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“EXCUSE ME MA’AM? THAT’S SIR TO YOU!”: PERCEPTIONS OF BUTCH  
PRIVILEGE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

by

MIKEL L. WALTERS

Under the Direction of Denise Donnelly

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on perceptions of butch privilege in the undergraduate student body at Georgia State University. Butch privilege is similar to traditional definitions of privilege, whether male, white or heterosexual. I define it as the unearned and unacknowledged privilege experienced by a butch lesbian (perceived or self-identified) due to her occupation of masculinity. In order to investigate this topic, an exploratory quantitative analysis of how perceptions of masculinity and status are associated with butch privilege was conducted. A survey consisting of questions regarding participants’ perceptions of how differential privileges are extended to masculine and feminine looking women were presented to undergraduate students during introductory sociology classes. I found that the privileges traditionally reserved for white males in society are perceived to be extended to white butch lesbians due to their occupation of masculinity.

INDEX WORDS: Gender, Privilege, Perceptions, Stereotypes, Butch Privilege

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by

MIKEL L. WALTERS

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2005

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2005

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by

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## INTRODUCTION

Within the lesbian community<sup>1</sup> there is a social phenomenon referred to as “butch privilege” (Maltry and Tucker, 2001). Though not clearly defined, in its simplest form butch privilege is an extension of and directly related to the traditional definition of privilege (advantage or special favor granted to a particular group) whether male, white or heterosexual. The extension of this traditional definition is possibly due to the fluidity that exists between sex, gender and sexual orientation. These three are analytically distinct, although empirically overlapping (West and Zimmer, 1987). The intersection of these characteristics is not predictable and does not obey previously accepted norms. Lorber (1994:61) explains “...physical anatomy, sexual desire and practices, social roles and public identity do not necessarily coalesce into uniform and constant combinations, but often cross-cut and shift with time.”

In keeping with the traditional definition of privilege, I define butch privilege as the unearned and unacknowledged (McIntosh, 1989) privilege experienced by a perceived or self-identified butch lesbian attributable to her occupation of masculinity. Butch privilege is directly related to female masculinity, and with it, I seek to add a new dimension to the existent body of research.

Female masculinity is an illusive phrase that is difficult to define using one set of terms. It is much easier to recognize than to characterize, as with traditional male masculinity. The everyday use of the term masculinity adds to the complication

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<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, there is no single lesbian community. Their existence is multifaceted and diverse. For the purpose of this paper the term “lesbian community” is meant to encompass all lesbian communities.

of its definition. Judith Halberstam attempts to corral the term by stating “female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing.” (1998:1). She continues her attempts by establishing a workable understanding by marrying masculinity to the power of inheritance and the promise of social privilege. I define female masculinity more in line with the butch lesbian identity and ownership of masculinity rather than some kind of rejected scraps. A butch’s masculinity comes from a position of power and status, rather than rejection and dismissal. Outward cues including her dress, demeanor and the way in which she occupies her physical space send a message of confidence, power and strength; all of which are crucial elements of traditional masculinity and not discarded seconds.

The concept of privilege is pervasive within hierarchal societies. Traditionally, privilege has been defined as having an advantageous status. I seek to broaden such a definition to include the concept of privilege as a symbiotic relationship. Privilege is beneficial to the holder as well as those directly involved with the holder. The intersection of privilege with gender, race and sexuality is a complex junction where the lines between the privileged and the non-privileged are blurred. The existence of privilege is convoluted in that one can hold privilege in one realm and not in another. For example, white women are recipients of privilege due to their race; simultaneously, white women are denied privilege based on gender.

The hierarchal structure in which male privilege operates does not directly lend itself to butch privilege. Male privilege is a cornerstone of the patriarchal configuration of mainstream society. Butch lesbians do not find themselves alongside men at the pinnacle of society’s hierarchal structure. They are often “othered” due to their sexuality and

nonconformity to traditional gender roles. This dichotomy of being privileged based on masculinity and othered due to sexuality locates butch privilege in a semi-hierarchal structure and in social, as well as, interpersonal relationships. The mainstream social experience of privilege is directly related to masculinity. The butch lesbian's occupation of masculinity buys her access to privilege in the straight community. Furthermore, butch privilege is firmly implanted in the butch lesbian's personal arena, where her privilege is reinforced by the status of her identity in her personal relationships and within the lesbian community.

In order to investigate the existence of such privilege, I conducted a quantitative analysis of the perceptions of masculinity in women and the privilege associated with perceptions of butch privilege<sup>2</sup>. I presented a survey to undergraduate students at Georgia State University during introductory sociology classes. The narrow scope of the sample selection was designed to elicit feedback from a population of students whose education might not yet have been influenced by sociological thought. The survey consisted of questions regarding each participant's perceptions of how differential privileges are extended to masculine and feminine looking women. I found that the privileges traditionally reserved for white males in this society were extended to white butch lesbians due to their occupation of masculinity. My findings are useful in exposing inequality within butch-femme lesbian relationships, as well as further the understanding of privilege associated with masculinity.

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<sup>2</sup> This paper is limited to the study of White butch privilege and does not take into account masculinity as represented in other races or cultures.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Although some theorists (Halberstam, 1998) have examined both masculinity and butch masculinity, no one has investigated butch privilege. The absence of butch privilege in the literature review is indicative of the lack of research done in this area. Privilege within already marginalized groups has not been the focus of inequality scholarship. In order to lay the structural foundation of butch privilege, I discuss basic ideas regarding privilege and outline the ways in which privilege operates in other arenas of social life. In the following sections, I examine the social construction of masculinity along with an exploration of butch history, butch-femme dichotomy, and butch identity.

### **Privilege**

Privilege is a hierarchal arrangement that has infiltrated many societal arenas and institutions (Kruks, 2005). McIntosh (1989:1) defines white privilege as: “an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.” In addition, the elusive nature of privilege provides shelters to those who enjoy it, since it is virtually invisible. Because privileged groups set social norms, its structural components are so hidden and taken for granted that privilege appears almost natural (Wildman, 1995). One of the most powerful assets privilege bestows is invisibility. It allows privilege to remain undetected, while reinforcing and re-creating itself (Wildman, 1995).

The lack of recognition of privilege is not done with malicious intent. Privilege is constructed in such a way that it blinds recipients and non-recipients alike. As Rothenberg (2002:8) claims “it’s invisible to basically decent people who should know better.” This blindness is perpetuated by the intersectionality in which privilege operates.

Because forms of privilege are not isolated within themselves, the structure of privilege often allows those who are oppressed in one area to be privileged in another (Wildman, 1995; Kruks, 2005). For example, a heterosexual black woman may experience oppression due to her race but is privileged through her sexuality. The illogical location of a person on either side of privilege allows it to be hidden even further out of sight (Wildman, 1995).

Academia has paid attention to many types of privilege. The interlocking of hierarchies has led to the further exploration of how and where privilege operates (McIntosh, 1989). Male privilege, heterosexual privilege, and white privilege are well known types of privilege and most relevant to the discussion at hand.

### **Male Privilege**

Males' domination of society is so prevalent that it appears virtually unnoticed within the hierarchal structure of our society. Males appear to be the cornerstone on which society rests. Often we accept their actions without question. They are seemingly the obvious authority in any position they hold. Males hold the majority of power, and financial wealth, and dominate our political and governmental institutions.

The way in which this hierarchal structure of privilege is perpetuated is that members of society are judged and measured by the characteristics or norms set forth by the privileged group (Wildman, 1995). Such judgment reaffirms and solidifies the ability of white males to continue in their domination of society, setting the norms for gender as well as race.

Carbado (2000) provides a perfect example of this domination and some men's ability to set social norms. He (Carbado, 2000:6) constructs a catalog outlining his gender

privilege “I can walk in public, alone, without fear of being sexually violated...I do not have to choose between a family and a career...I am not less manly because I play sports...Every month is (white) Men’s history month...” While Carbado recognizes male’s privilege, he states that most “...men accept present-day social gender arrangements and ideologies about gender as necessary, prepolitical and inevitable.”

It is this inevitability that leads to the invisibility and the appearance of an acceptable order of things with male privilege at its roots. This situation lulls men into an acceptance of “that’s just how things are,” wherein men do not intentionally discriminate (Wildman, 1995). Men’s denial of any oppression works to protect their privilege from being acknowledged, altered, or arrested (McIntosh, 1989). It is this fundamental distortion of a world perspective that allows for privilege to exist (Wildman, 1995).

### **Heterosexual Privilege**

Male privilege is also an active component in heterosexual privilege. Both are a result of a gender hierarchy in which the male is positioned as superior to the female (Wildman, 1995). Their superiority is reaffirmed in the thought that heterosexuality confirms and reaffirms normalcy (Carbado, 2000). Heterosexuality is the norm, unproblematic and compulsory (Rich, 1980; Epstein, 1998). Halperin (as in Schilichter, 1995:1) frames the invisibility of heterosexuality:

“The crucial, empowering incoherence at the core of heterosexuality and its definition never becomes visible because heterosexuality itself is never an object of knowledge, a target of scrutiny in its own right, so much as it is the condition for the supposedly objective, disinterested knowledge of other objects.”

A number of scholars have argued that the dominance of institutionalized heterosexuality exists only through the hetero/homo divide and its universalization has

made heterosexuality invisible as a sexual practice of identity (Schlichter, 2004). The invisible right and the extremely visible wrong leads to a privilege that is as transparent as the sexual identity itself. Because of its transparency I find it fruitful to illustrate heterosexual privilege by highlighting the more visible homosexual oppression.

According to Fajer (1992), society has set understandings about gays and lesbians. This common understanding includes ideas that gay issues are inappropriate for public discussion, and that gays and lesbians partake in sexual activity that is consuming, obsessive, and devoid of love, committed relationships and family structure. Another problematic stereotype is that gays and lesbians exhibit behavior of a gender different from their own. While Fajer doesn't specifically address heterosexual privilege, his concepts of social understandings speak directly to such advantages. Heterosexual privilege labels gays and lesbians as aberrant and deviant in comparison to societal norms.

The aberrancy of homosexuals requires that they "come out" on their own or be pointed out by society (Carbado, 2000). There is no need for heterosexuals to "come out." Such an action would seem ridiculous. Heterosexuality is the norm while homosexuality is not. Heterosexism is definitely one of the calling cards of heterosexual privilege. It is the norm and straight men work hard to keep their sexuality front and center (Edelman, 1990; as cited in Carbado, 2000). Such observable performances reaffirm the heteronormative nature of sexuality, an essential part of heterosexual privilege. This hard work is paying off in the media, homosexuals are getting a heteronormative makeover in prime time sitcoms; negating their sexuality, and making them more palatable to the viewing audience.



The popularity of token gays on television has modeled such depictions of queers into being more palatable. Heterosexual privilege is at work in mainstream media almost “de-gaying” gays by first desexualizing them, rarely showing them in sexual situations or romantic interludes (Gross, 2001; Walters, 2001). This trend also depicts gays as absent of any gay social or political life (Brookey, 1996; Dow, 2001; Walters, 2001).

### **White Privilege**

Donnelly et al. (2005:6) define white privilege as the “... system of benefits, advantages and opportunities experienced by white persons in our society simply because of their skin color.” The “invisible knapsack” that has underlined this entire discussion of privilege is McIntosh’s (1989) contribution to the study of white privilege. According to McIntosh, members of the white majority experience an ease of movement throughout society with their special provisions and codebooks to assist with navigation.

The invisibility of privilege itself continues to perpetuate the domination of one group over another (Wildman, 1995). For whites it is not only why white privilege continues - invisibility is an embedded element of White privilege. Members of the white race have been privileged to the point of invisibility (Frankenberg, 1993). Whites are often unaware of their skin color or that “white” is even a color (Feagin and Vera, 1995).

Socialization inculcates whites with the inability to see their own color as well as the privilege associated with it. Such inability is passed along as a pattern of assumptions (McIntosh, 1989) including the expectation that whites will always be at center stage, no matter the topic (Wildman, 1995). This assumption leads to whites believing the entire world revolves around them and their concerns, needs and desires. Such an egocentric view only works to reinforce and reaffirm the existing racial status quo.

Rothenburg (2000:5) notes, “It is necessary to hear, see, touch, taste, [and] smell the way the world looks to people who are blind to their own privilege.” Rothenburg explains that “well meaning” whites continue to make choices that further entrench themselves, and their children, unknowingly or not, into the institution of white privilege.

### **Masculinity**

Zimmerman and West (1987) explore the concept of “doing” gender. Sex is a biological or ascribed, status, while gender is an acquired characteristic; and, therefore, accomplished. People “do” gender through a life long repetition of the movements, motions, looks, language and learned traits that signal to society that one is a member of a particular sex, regardless of their genitalia. These traits to which each gender subscribes are not mutually exclusive. Gender is prescribed by culture rather than nature (Garlick, 2003) and has varied over time and across societies. This separation of gender from sex frees masculinity or femininity from any biological assignment.

This freedom runs counter to the socialization of traditional gender roles that provide a script for gender relations, attitudes and beliefs (Philaretou and Allen, 2001). Traditional gender socialization requires boys to become dominant, goal-oriented and independent in order to define their own masculinity (Gilmore, 1990; Gross, 1992; Pittman, 1993; Real, 1997). Even though masculine traits are arguably found historically in males, an examination of masculinity without biological attachment furthers the case that gender is separate from sex.

Halberstam (1998) argues, “In fact, masculinity is most complicated and transgressive when it is not tied to the male body, especially the straight, white, male body.” She continues this argument by positioning masculinity as independent,

unattached to the male sex, while historically receiving influence from both males and females. The reduction of masculinity to the male body prohibits a complete investigation of how masculinity is constructed (Halberstam, 1998). Without such a complete examination, society will continue to face great difficulty defining rather than recognizing masculinity.

Butch masculinity and power transcend the hetero-homosexual boundaries. Although butch lesbians and straight men have obvious differences, there are intricate similarities that rise out of the social construction of masculinity. In opposition, heterosexuals have no significant differences in gender roles in or out of the sexual situation (Rosenzweig and Lebow, 1992). Men are the obvious aggressors while women remain at the mercy of men. Males feel the greatest threat to their masculinity within sexual situations (Garlick, 2003), especially if they perceive their performance is less than expected. On the other hand, while butches feel the most satisfied and most secure during sexual interludes (Rosenzweig and Lebow, 1992), it is an interpersonal experience rather than performance based.

Weber (1996) discovered that the lower the socio-economic class and education of lesbians, the more they tend to identify themselves within the butch-femme dyad. Similarly, Archer and Yamashita (2003) revealed that the lower the socio-economic class and education of heterosexual men, the more these men adhere to strict traditional gender-role attitudes. According to their findings, men's need for traditional masculinity increased when they lacked higher education. In correlation with Weber's study (1996), it appears that traditional masculinity is one of the common elements among those with lower socioeconomic class and lower educational attainment regardless of sex. I

hypothesize that this group's limited access to other forms of privilege increase the intensity of their focus on traditional gender roles, which provide the hierarchal structure of male privilege.

### **Butch History**

In order to understand butch privilege and the many different facets of this social phenomenon, we must examine its origin. Butch privilege came into existence suddenly in the early 1900s. The power that butch women began to commandeer coincided with the appearance of butch lesbians in mainstream society, even though these women would not have called themselves lesbian or their actions homosexual (Halberstam, 1998).

In the mid-1800's, lower and middle class women seeking an independent life began to dress as men and pass as men in order to get higher paying jobs that would allow them to support themselves and remain independent from men or marriage. By passing as men, these women enjoyed the freedoms afforded to only men of the time. Acting as men, women were able to earn a wage that offered independent lifestyle and the means, as well as the liberty, to travel. This unfettered lifestyle increased their knowledge and understanding of the world in which they lived and stood in sharp contrast to the restricted exposure that most women of that era experienced (Faderman, 1991).

These women -- perceived as men-- suddenly had all the white male privilege granted at the time. They could open bank accounts; write checks, own property, vote and travel unaccompanied. This type of transvestitism began as early as the Civil War. Faderman (1991) approximates that, according to one Union Army doctor, there were at least four hundred women transvestites who fought in the Civil War.

For most of these women, their sexuality was not central to their decision to dress, work and live as men. It was the privileges they received based on the supposition they were men. Faderman (1991) points out that the sexologists of the time assumed these women which were passing as males had a sexual desire for other women and automatically classified them into the newly constructed “invert” category: a medical term once used to explain homosexuality.

Due to this medicalization of sexuality, sexologists concluded that these women (inverts) who dressed and acted like men must be men trapped in women’s bodies (Halberstam, 1998; Faderman, 1991). Simultaneously, these scientists discounted feminine looking women who openly expressed their same-sex desires as inconsequential and invalid. These couples, comprised of masculine and feminine women, were commonly dismissed as romantic friendships or devoted companions (Faderman, 1991).

### **Butch-Femme Dichotomy**

Historically, identification within the lesbian community has been comprised of two distinctly different, polar roles: butch and femme. This dichotomy is often theorized together (Rifkin, 2002) making these identities crucial within the lesbian social community (Levitt and Horne, 2002). These gender expressions act as makers for sexual attraction, desire and behavior within the lesbian community (Levitt and Horne, 2002). Martin (1994) argues that the theorizing of butch and femme together lessens the autonomy and power of the femme. The well-established butch identity overpowers that of the femme and therefore leaves her dependent on her butch partner for identity and recognition (Rifkin, 2002).

Maltry and Tucker (2002) note that not only are femme lesbians invisible to the lesbian community as well as to mainstream society, they will remain so due to the constant attention that butch lesbians receive. Kennedy and Davis (1993) insist: “femmes are not only less visible than butches, but also issues and problems of lesbian history are defined from a butch perspective.” This, coupled with the idea that this is a time of resurgence and renewed interest in butch writing, will continue to diminish the role of femmes and leave their voices hushed (Levitt and Horne, 2002).

Even though butch women continue to hold important roles in the lesbian community, they have come in and out of favor within the lesbian community. In the 1940’s, some femme lesbians reported that even though the butches were vitally important, the femmes were sometimes reluctant to be seen with such out and tough butches. The butches’ outward appearance drew attention to the group and often made life harder for all lesbians involved (Kennedy and Davis, 1996).

During the second wave of feminism, butch identity was somewhat dismissed and thought of as outdated and only occupied by less educated lesbians (Kennedy and Davis, 1996). The lesbians of this generation had two different schools of thought when they abandoned the butch/femme gender roles. First, they felt the butch/femme dichotomy was a heterosexist imitation of an oppressive patriarchy. Roof (1998) states that butch lesbians often treated femme lesbians as second-class citizens. Butch lesbians expected femme lesbians to be their housekeepers as well as their lovers. She uses the term “pseudo male chauvinist” when summarizing the attitudes of butches. Butch lesbians of this era were actively oppressing femme lesbians in the same ways the patriarchy was oppressing all women.

In addition, some 1970's lesbians felt that in order to advance their cause they must make lesbian identity more palatable to mainstream society. Lesbianism wanted a public facelift. The feminist movement needed to gain respect and understanding from its heterosexual peers and lesbians needed to be included in this feminist movement (Kennedy and Davis, 1996). In order to gain this acceptance, some were willing to marginalize identities within the community. As a result, lesbians began moving away from the butch/femme dichotomy. A new lesbian identity was born: androgyny. Androgyny was devoid of clear gender markers. There was no overt masculine or feminine expression. Lesbians' identities bordered on invisibility in order to achieve equality. Androgyny worked to bring lesbians closer to the midline of a socially acceptable identity in the feminist movement as well as mainstream society (Kennedy and Davis, 1996).

### **Butch Identity**

Since the second wave of the feminist movement, multiple lesbian identities have resurfaced. Once again, butch lesbians have become more accepted within the lesbian community. As always, butch lesbians are the most recognizable and identifiable lesbian identity, as their distinct form of masculinity is readily acknowledged (Inness and Lloyd, 1996). Their masculine identity sends a message of power and control due to the socialization of traditional gender roles already in place in our patriarchal society.

Lesbian masculinity brings power to the butch herself. Her dress, body language, and manner in which she carries herself all serve as outward cues of her masculinity. These not only speak for her individual self, but also for her relationship. The very presence of the butch often signifies to society that her relationship is lesbian in nature.

This type of importance has historically only been attached to men within the heterosexual community. The recognition of her masculinity brings her power and status within the lesbian community, but also makes her the target of ridicule in the form of verbal as well as physical attacks (Rifkin, 2002; Levitt and Horne, 2002) from members of mainstream society.

Femme lesbians can “pass” as heterosexuals and often display more acceptable traditional gender roles, whereas butches cannot. This “passing” appears to give femmes a social advantage, but it also assumes a femme’s sexuality to be heterosexual, which is ultimately defined and controlled by men. Conversely, a butch’s sexuality is solidified by this impassibility (Rifkin, 2002). Many heterosexuals commonly assume femmes are also heterosexual, where butches are thought to be strictly homosexual without question (Maltry and Tucker, 2002). This questionability of the butch lesbian’s sexuality could be both a liability and privilege.

Halberstam (1996) argues that butches do not experience privilege as do males in mainstream society. Butch women suffer under the rules of patriarchy just as other women. Rifkin (2002) counters that butches are unaffected by oppression from mainstream society. She further states that within the lesbian community, a butch is a powerhouse: dominant, powerful and in complete control. Kanner (2002) further expresses the solidity of the butch identity: “Here is one of the most salient aspects of the butch lesbian, an important aspect of the utility of this category for research and analysis; her sexuality is always salient whether the context is sexual or not...The butch woman looks like who she is, to natives and non-natives alike.”



Rifkin (2002) explains that, in order for this power role to be legitimate, only a butch must display it. Heterosexual females or femme lesbians cannot convey the same message of power by simply dressing in masculine clothing. While self-identified butch women often dress “like a man” they do not correlate butch privilege or power with the popular notion of “trying to be a man” (Weber, 1996). This masculinity is not borrowed from men, but is solely uniquely occupied by the butch lesbian.

## **THEORY**

In order to understand the perceptions of lesbian masculinity, which lead to butch privilege, I used the theory of Social Construction. Butch privilege rests directly on the butch lesbian’s occupation of masculinity, not on biology; therefore her gender is socially constructed.

The foundational hypothesis of Social Construction Theory, also known as the sociology of knowledge, is that reality does not exist in a biological or natural state but is rather constructed by society (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Reality is created by how groups of individuals, words, symbols or even social movements are characterized and perceived by the culture at large. Such characterizations and perceptions are a collective effort to understand, construct and normalize reality. Berger and Luckmann (1966:33) reiterate “Social structure is the sum total of these typifications and of the recurrent patterns of interactions established by means of them. As such, societal structure is an essential element of the reality of everyday life.”

Just as reality is not grounded in nature but created in society, so is gender. Sex is born in biology, and gender is born in society. Identity is carved out of a multitude of different aspects in society. Lorber (1994:31) states: “At any one time, an individual’s

identity is a combination of the major ascribed statuses of gender, race, ethnicity, religion and social class, and the individual's achieved states, such as education level, occupation or profession, marital status, parenthood, prestige, authority and wealth." Such identities borne of ascribed and achieved statuses are built upon the importance that society places upon them. There are rules and regulations along with limits and boundaries, which each individual must learn and adhere to. The focus of this theoretical discussion will surround the social construction, the social organization, and the social control of gender.

Biological sex categories are transformed into gender by naming, dressing, and the use of other markers that signify one's gender. Such markers identify the way people move, gesture, and speak. These indicators are part of a predetermined set of socially acceptable markers that make up gender specific codes of conduct. Lorber (1994:1) refers to gender as "...an institution that establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the social processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family and politics and is also an entity in and of itself."

The socialization process of children includes learning their sex's respective signals, codes and markers. We are not born men or women (de Beauvoir, as cited by Seidman, 2003); we learn these roles through a social, sometimes coercive, process (Seidman, 2003; Gagnon and Simon, 1973). Lorber (1994:22) outlines the learning process:

"In early childhood, humans develop gendered personality structures and sexual orientation through their interaction with parents of the same and

opposite gender. As adolescents they conduct their sexual behavior according to gendered scripts. School, parents, peers and the mass media guide young people into gendered work and family roles. As adults, they take on a gendered social status in their society's stratification system."

Children not only learn the boundaries and regulations of their individual gender roles, but also the boundaries and regulations of the other gender's role. One way in which we learn what is acceptable is to know what is unacceptable. Part of what it means to be a woman is anything but masculine (Alsop, et al., 2002). Both identities are clearly socially constructed as Lorber (1994:26) explains "If gender differences were genetic, physiological or hormonal, gender bending and gender ambiguity would occur only in hermaphrodites, who are born with chromosomes and genitalia that are not clearly female or male." No matter how obvious or clear the social construction of gender is the rules of acceptable gender presentation have far reaching positive effects as well as negative consequences if they are not correctly followed or effectively accomplished (Alsop, et al., 2002).

Gender is controlled through both informal sanction of inappropriate gender behavior by peers and/or family and by more formal sanctions or threats by authorities if behavior is suspected to have veered too far from gender norms. Along with such sanctions, society applying social pressure and the weight of morality onto an individual enforces gender. The reinforcement comes through family, work and social interaction which make clear gender expectations for the individual (Lorber, 1994). People who do not obey the rules of their gender roles threaten the societal norms of heterosexuality, marriage and family. Deviance from these prescribed roles often leads to rejection of the

individual from mainstream society, harassment and even physical violence (Seidman, 2003).

Society uses gender as one of the major indicators of location in a stratification structure. Men rank above women within the same race and class. In every society, one gender is usually used as the “touchstone” (Lorber, 1994), the normal, the foundation, and the prevalent while the other gender(s) is/are labeled as aberrant, deviant and inferior. In the polarization of gender, men are valued, privileged and given higher social status due to the importance placed on masculinity.

Such privilege and status are assigned to masculinity by social construction rather than the biological classification of male. The relegation of privilege through masculinity is clearly demonstrated in the female-to-male transsexual. Women who become men experience not only a rise in status, but also rise in privilege. Male-to-female transsexuals experience just the opposite; they no longer have access to the status and privilege that is located within masculinity (Showalter, 1987).

Halberstam’s work reinforces the attachment of privilege to masculinity without the biological male sex. She cites women who perform masculinity successfully through dress and mannerisms as those who gain access to power and status. Alsop, et al. (2002:160) expose the fragility of such a detachment: “By removing the analysis of masculinity from the site of the male body the essential base of masculinity is revealed as a fabrication and the constructedness and artificiality of masculinity is exposed.” Power, privilege and status are accessed through the social construction of masculinity. They are not restricted to a biological human body possessing male genitalia.

Social construction clearly reveals the access panel to privilege that is located within masculinity and not biology. Butch lesbians occupy masculinity in a non-traditional but often stereotypical manner. Masculinity is a core identity marker for the butch lesbian. Therefore, social construction allows a privilege based solely on masculinity, not biology, to be occupied by the butch lesbian.

## **METHODOLOGY**

As a feminist researcher I feel it is important for researchers to self-identify. Through self-identification, research biases that exist within this study will be brought to light. I am a 36-year-old, white, middle-class, out, butch lesbian living in a large urban community in the southeast region of the United States. In my position as an out lesbian within my community, I have received many negative comments and concerns from the lesbian community about my research interests. Most lesbians I have spoken with express the concern that by examining butch privilege I am taking an adversarial stance towards the lesbian community and being a traitor to my own kind. Many feel that the focus needs to be placed on our similarities and not our differences in order to become more accepted or accommodated within mainstream society. Some lesbians do not identify nor do they recognize others self-identifications to specific sexual identities commonly used. My intention is definitely not to further alienate the lesbian community or its members. I do, however, feel strongly that identifying inequalities that exist in our personal as well as our societal relationships will lead to a more realistic understanding of the invisible mechanisms of our social hierarchy that prevents equality.

## **Research Questions**

This study examines perceptions of privilege assigned to the display of traditional gendered femininity and masculinity. Due to the exploratory nature of this project, I used guiding research questions rather than hypotheses. This prevented hypothesizing about the untested scale I am using to measure perceptions of privilege associated with masculinity. The research questions explored in this project were:

1. Are butch lesbians perceived to have masculine privilege?
2. If so, how do perceptions of privilege differ among the addressed areas of Career/Income, Service/Treatment, Mainstream Fashion/Beauty, Traditional Gender Roles, Sexuality and Crime?

Even though this is a predominantly quantitative project, it is important to allow for a small qualitative section that permits the respondent to expand on the reasoning behind her/his answers. This short explanation may yield rich insight into the basis of a respondent's answers.

## **Procedures**

For this project, I used data that I collected from a quantitative survey. This survey was distributed to undergraduate students at a large urban university. I administered the survey during the first class meeting of the summer 2005 session of introductory sociology classes: Introduction to Sociology and Social Problems. These classes were chosen to limit the influence that the teachings of sociology may have on students' opinions and perceptions.

An application for permission to conduct this research was completed and submitted to the Institutional Review Board. I was granted permission from the IRB to collect and conduct this research during the 2005/2006 academic year. All IRB protocols were implemented and followed throughout this project.

### **Sample**

The sample consisted of 227 undergraduate students at Georgia State University. GSU reported that the overall undergraduate student body in Fall 2004 was comprised of 61% female (n=11,551) and 39% male (n=7,368). The racial breakdown of the student body in Fall of 2004 was 44.94% White, non-Hispanic (n=8,504); 32.63% Black, non-Hispanic (n=6,174); 10.74% Asian or Pacific Islander (n=2,031); 8.01% Multi-Racial (n=1,515); 3.44% Hispanic (n=652) and 0.23% American Indian or Alaskan Native (n=43) (Board of Regents 2004).

In comparison to the demographics of the university, the project sample was comprised of 70.90% female (n=158) and 29.10 males (n=65). The racial breakdown of the sample was 28.10% White, non-Hispanic (n=62); 47.10% Black, non-Hispanic (n=104); 10.90% Asian or Pacific Islander (n=25); 5.00% Multi-racial (n=11); 2.30% Hispanic (n=5) and 6.28% other (n=14).

Table 4.1 presents a comparison of demographics between sample population and the university's undergraduate population. In the sample there were a higher percentage of females than male. Females comprised 70.90% while males made 29.10% of the sample population. The university's undergraduate population has a gender make up of 61.06% female and 38.94% male. In terms of race, a shift between blacks and whites was seen from the undergraduate population to the sample population. Black, non-Hispanics

are represented in the sample population at a higher percentage than found in the undergraduate population. Black, non-Hispanics make up 47.10% of the sample population while making up only 32.63% of the undergraduate population. White, non-Hispanics make up only 28.10% of the sample population while making 44.95% of the undergraduate population.

The Multi-Racial race category saw a lower representation in the sample than in the undergraduate population. In the undergraduate population individuals who identify as Multi-Racial make up 8.00% of the population. In the sample population, those individuals made up 5.00% of the sample.

On the whole, other racial groups were represented equally in the sample as in the undergraduate population. Asians or Pacific Islanders make up 10.9% of all sample cases while they make up 10.74% of the undergraduate population. Hispanics made up 2.30% of the sample and 3.45% of the undergraduate population. While American Indians and Alaskan Natives make up 0.23% of the undergraduate population, this racial category was not a provided response in the instrument. However, this racial group could have been captured in the “other” category that was provided in the instrument. In the sample, 6.30% of the respondents selected “other” as their racial category of choice.

**Table 4.1: Demographic Comparison - Percentage**

	Sample	GSU
GENDER		
Female	70.90	61.06
Male	29.10	38.94



**Table 4.1: Demographic Comparison - Percentage**

	Sample	GSU
RACE		
White, non-Hispanic	28.10	44.95
Black, non-Hispanic	47.10	32.63
Asian or Pacific Islander	10.90	10.74
Multi-Racial	5.00	8.00
Hispanic	2.30	3.45
American Indian or Alaskan Native	--	0.23
Other	6.30	--

### **Instrument**

The butch index was created in response to the lack of other scales that could adequately measure an individual's perceptions of privilege butch lesbians may experience. In an attempt to establish butch privilege as a verifiable extension of traditional privileges an instrument needed to be developed that measured individual perceptions. Based on a review of the literature and my experience within the lesbian community, I selected the items for this scale. It is not a perfect scale but it is a strong beginning for exploratory research examining butch privilege. Given the developing stage of empirical research surrounding butch privilege, such data can be useful in formulating hypotheses for later testing with more representative samples.

The instrument was divided into three sections. Section I consisted of 30 questions using a modified Likert scale to assess the existence of privilege. The questions were grouped into five categories that address respondents' perceptions of differences

experienced by both a feminine and masculine lesbian. The survey employed a design in which two pictures of lesbian women were provided. These pictures were displayed side by side on a single page. The more feminine woman was entitled “A” while the more masculine woman was entitled “B”. Respondents were asked to answer a series of questions based on comparison of the two pictures. The categories are: Career/Income, Service/Treatment, Mainstream Fashion/Beauty, Traditional Gender Roles and Crime.

Section II was comprised of a comprehensive demographics section. Respondents were asked about their age, biological sex, educational attainment, relationship status, sexuality, religious and political views as well as their family of origin’s social class and parents’ educational attainment.

Section III assessed respondents’ underlying homophobia toward lesbians and beliefs surrounding traditional gender roles. All three sections were combined to form the instrument used for this project. The complete instrument, including recruitment script, pictures and informed consent are included in Appendix A.

## **MEASUREMENT**

### **Dependent Variable**

The dependent variable is comprised of an index I created specifically for this project. The butch index was constructed using 19 of the 30 original questions from Section I designed to identify individuals’ perceptions of masculine privilege. The *Butch index* was constructed by combining the following variables: Who is more likely to be hired as a secretary? (jobsec), Who is more likely to be hired as a construction worker? (jobcon), Who is more likely to get a better deal when buying a car? (carman), Who is more likely to get a better customer service from a man at the local home improvement

store? (cursrvm), Who is more likely to be able to ‘talk’ their way out of a speeding ticket with a male police officer? (spticm), Who is more likely to have someone offer to change her flat tire? (fltire), Who is more likely to be a victim of rape? (rapvic), Who is the more likely target of sexual harassment from a man? (sexhrm), Who is more likely to be the aggressor in a domestic violence situation? (domvoi), Who is more likely to do the majority of the housework? (hsewrk), Who is more likely to be responsible for child rearing? (child), Who is more likely to be a biological mother? (biomom), Who is more likely to have male friends? (malefrd), Who is more likely to hang out with their friends, even when they have family responsibilities? (famres), Who is more likely to play sports? (sports), Who is more likely to be an ‘out’ lesbian? (outles), Who is more likely to be the sexual aggressor in their intimate relationships? (sexagg), Who is more likely to buy beauty products? (beapro) and Who is more likely to be interested in the latest style in clothes, shoes, makeup and fashion in general? (fashin). The number of variables were reduced to 19 in order to provide greater internal validity of the scale (based on factor analysis described later).

The *Butch index* used a modified Likert scale to compare the respondent perceptions of the two pictures provided. The answers in this section were selected from five possible choices 1=A is much more likely than B, 2=A is somewhat more likely than B, 3=A and B are equally as likely, 4=B is somewhat more likely than A, 5=B is much more likely than A. Career and Income contained two variables: jobsec and jobcon. Service and treatment contained four variables: carman, cursrvm , spticm, fltire. Mainstream Fashion and Beauty contained two variables: beapro and fashin. Traditional

gender roles contained six variables: *hsewrk*, *child*, *biomom*, *malefrd*, *famres*, *sports*. Crime contained three variables: *rapvic*, *sexhrm*, *domvio*.

The score for this scale can range from 19-95, with the higher scores representing perceptions of privilege associated with butch masculinity and lower scores representing perceptions of no privilege associated with butch masculinity. Due to the limited number of variables in each section, all sections were combined into one scale measuring the perceptions of butch privilege. I reversed the following nine variables to more accurately reflect a score that represents the increased perception of butch privilege: *jobsec*, *fltire*, *rapvic*, *sexhrm*, *hsewrk*, *child*, *biomom*, *beapro*, *fashin*.

### **Independent Variables**

The independent variables in this study are traditional gender role beliefs and homophobia. In order to measure traditional gender role beliefs I used an abbreviated version of Thompson and Pleck's (1986) Male Role Norm Scale and eleven statements often used by the General Social Survey (Davis & Smith 2002) assessing attitudes towards women's roles. The Male Role Norm Scale is comprised of three subscales containing 26 items. The three subscales are: the Anti-Femininity subscale, The Toughness Norm subscale and the Status Norm subscale. Because I am assessing traditional gender role beliefs, I used only the Status Norm and Toughness subscales. I selected two questions from the Status Norm subscale and five questions from the Toughness subscale for a total of seven questions from the two subsections.

The "Status Norm" subscale contains two Likert scale questions that address respondents' definitions of gender roles for men. The scale ranges from 2-10, with higher scores representing firmer beliefs in traditional male gender roles. The "Toughness"

subscale also contains five Likert scale questions, but focuses on respondent's ideas of masculinity. The scale ranges from 5-25, with higher scores representing more traditional ideas about masculinity. The seven items used from Male Role Norm scale are listed in Appendix B.

The eleven statements assessing attitudes towards women's roles were combined to create Attitudes Towards Women index (Fem scale). This index contains eleven Likert scale questions addressing respondents' beliefs about traditional gender roles for women. The scale ranges from 11-55 with higher scores representing greater beliefs in traditional female gender roles. The eleven items used in Women Role Norm index are listed in Appendix C.

In order to assess underlying homophobia of the respondents, I used a subsection of Herek's (1984) Revised Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gays (ATLG-R), which is comprised of two subsections. One subsection assesses homophobic attitudes towards gay men. The other subsection assesses homophobic attitudes towards lesbians. Because I am dealing with lesbians in this study, I am using the subsection pertaining to attitudes towards lesbians. This subsection contains ten Likert scale questions and the scale ranges from 10-90 with lower scores representing extremely positive attitudes in regard to lesbians. The ten items used from the ATLG-R are listed in Appendix D.

### **Control Variables**

The control variables consist of eleven socio-demographic variables: age, sex, race, sexual identity, relationship status, education level, mother's education, father's education, social class, religiosity and political affiliation. Age (AGE) was collected in number of years. Sex (SEX) was coded as a dummy variable (0=Male, 1=Female). Race

(RACE) was coded as a seven category nominal variable (Asian, Black, Latino/a, Multiracial, Pacific Islander, White, Other). Sexual identity (SEXID) was collected as a five category nominal variable (homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, transsexual, other). Relationship status (RELSTAT) was coded as a dummy variable (0=married or marriage like relationship, 1=not married). Education was collected as an ordinal level variable (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, graduate student). Mother's education (MOEDU) and Father's education (FAEDU) were each collected as an interval level variable (highest year of education completed). Family of origin social class was collected as an ordinal level variable (working class, working/middle class, middle class, middle/upper class, upper class).

I measured religiosity using three variables assessing a person's religiosity. The three variables are; what type of religious views a person holds (FUND) which was coded as a dichotomous variable (0=Moderate/Liberal, 1=Fundamental), how often a person attends church (ATTEND), which was collected as a nine category ordinal variable (1=never, 2=less than once a year, 3=once a year, 4=several times a year, 5=once a month, 6= two-three times a month, 7=nearly every week, 8=every week, 9=more than once a week) and strength of religious affiliation (reliten) which has four possible answers in the index (4=strong, 3=not very strong, 2=somewhat strong, 1=no religious affiliation). The higher scores represent strong religiosity and lower scores represent weak or no religiosity.

Political affiliation was measured by two nominal variables: political view and political party affiliation. Political view (POLVIEWS) was collected as an seven category ordinal variable (1=extremely liberal, 2=liberal, 3=slightly liberal, 4=moderate,

5=slightly conservative, 6=conservative, 7=extremely conservative), and political party affiliation (PARTYID) was collected as a seven category ordinal variable (1=strong democrat, 2=moderate democrat, 3=independent near democrat, 4=independent, 5=independent near republican, 6=moderate republican, 7=strong republican). Higher scores represent stronger conservative political views and lower scores represent stronger liberal political views.

Due to the limited number of cases, two control variables were recoded. Race (RACE) was recoded from a seven category nominal variable (Asian, Black, Latino/a, Multiracial, Pacific Islander, White, Other) into a dummy variable (0=White, 1=Black). Sexual identity (SEXID) was recoded from a five category nominal variable (homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, transsexual, other) to a dichotomous dummy variable (0=Heterosexual, 1=Non-heterosexual). Responses other than those represented in dichotomous variables were labeled as missing.

### **Data Management**

All the data was coded and entered into SPSS. This information was electronically stored in a password-protected computer. Hard copies of the data were secured and maintained in a locked cabinet to which only my thesis chair and I have access. The original questionnaires were stored in the same locked cabinet and will be shredded once the project is complete. A pilot test was performed during spring semester 2005 in an undergraduate sociology class.

## Data Analysis

I entered the data in SPSS and performed preliminary data analysis. The data was cleaned and sorted. Surveys that were not completed or did not meet IRB requirements were removed and destroyed.

In the first stage of data analysis, I performed a descriptive statistical analysis to test the existence of perceived butch privilege<sup>3</sup>. This first stage primarily used frequency tables to analyze such existence. In addition, I performed factor analysis on the various butch privilege variables in order to investigate any multidimensionality in the concept. The various butch privilege variables include; Career/Income, Service/Treatment, Mainstream Fashion/Beauty, Traditional Gender Roles, and Crime. Checks for reliability and validity were conducted, including the use of Cronbach's alpha. In the second phase, I performed bivariate statistical analysis to discover the differences in demographic variables of participants who were more likely to have or not have perceptions of butch privilege.

In the third phase, I used multivariate statistical analysis to discover what influences perceptions of butch privilege. Because the dependent variable, butch privilege, is a scale and can be considered a continuous variable, I used Ordinary Least Squares regression in a two-stage regression model to perform the analyses. The independent variables of homophobia and traditional gender roles were introduced into the regression model along with various control variables discussed earlier in the proposal. The first model used OLS regression to analyze the impact of the independent variables, homophobia and traditional gender role beliefs, on the dependent variable,

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<sup>3</sup> Due the use of a non-probability sample significant tests were not conducted in this project.



butch privilege. The second model used multiple regression model building to analyze the impact of independent variables, homophobia and traditional gender role beliefs, on the dependent variable, perceptions of butch privilege, while controlling for sex, race, sexual identity, family of origin social class, church attendance and political views.

I also analyzed the quantitative comments which respondents included after each section of the instrument. During analysis I grouped answers to each question together, read through to identify recurrent themes and then chose the quotes that best illustrated the themes. These comments provide a better understanding of the reasoning behind the respondent's answers in the instrument. They are included in the analysis of the butch index.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Descriptive/Frequency**

Frequencies and descriptive stats were run for all independent and dependent variables. Table 6.0 presents the mean score for each interval variable or nominal/ordinal variable with more than 4 categories (Strength of Religious Affiliations, Attendance of Religious Services, Family Social Class, Father's Level of Education, Mother's Level of Education, Political Party Affiliation, and Political Views). Frequencies are presented for all other nominal and ordinal variables.

**Table 6.0: Descriptive Statistics for all Variables**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean/Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Range</b>
Butch Index	72.65 (213)	47

**Table 6.0: Descriptive Statistics for all Variables**

Fem Scale	23.49 (219)	35
Homophobia Scale	20.64 (212)	38
Masc Scale	19.33 (218)	28
Race		1
White	37.30%	
Black	62.70% (166)	
Family Social Class	2.54 (225)	4
Father's Level of Education	3.38 (212)	4
Mother's Level of Education	3.37 (218)	4
Sex		1
Female	70.90%	
Male	29.10% (223)	
Sexual ID		1
Heterosexual	84.20%	
Non-Heterosexual	15.80% (222)	
Relationship Status		2
Married	27.20%	
Single	72.30% (224)	
Religious Views		1
Liberal/Moderate/None	80.00%	
Fundamental	20.00% (210)	
Strength of Religious Affiliation	2.45 (222)	3

**Table 6.0: Descriptive Statistics for all Variables**

Attendance of Religious Service	4.69 (223)	8
Political Party Affiliation	2.89 (217)	6
Political Views	3.26 (214)	6

The dependent variable, butch index had a mean score of 72.65. The feminine scale had a mean score of 23.49, the homophobia scale had a mean score of 20.64 and the masculine scale had a mean of 19.33. All three scales comprised the Independent Variable.

The mean score for family social class was 2.54. Father's education level had a mean score of 2.54. While mother's education level had a mean score of 3.37.

The sex frequency was 29.10% males and 70.90% female. The sample consisted of 84.20% heterosexual while 15.80% reported to be non-heterosexual. 27.20% of the respondents were involved in marriage or marriage like relationships. 72.30% reported they were single.

When asked about their religious views, 20.00% of all respondents reported they held fundamental views. While the 80.00% held liberal, moderate or no religious views. In terms of strength of religious affiliation, the mean score was 2.45. Political party affiliation had a mean score of 2.89. Political views had a mean score of 3.26.

## **Butch Index**

Frequency tables were used to analyze the existence of butch privilege. Table 6.1 denotes the mean scores of each individual question included in the final scale. The possible score ranged from 1 to 5 with a higher score representing greater perceptions of butch privilege; midrange scores (2.5 to 3.5) represent equal perception of privilege for both women and a lower score represents no perceptions of butch privilege. As noted previously, some questions were reverse coded to reflect the correct score that represents the respondent's perception of butch privilege.

When asked, respondents favored the feminine looking woman for only one question. "Who is more likely to be able to 'talk' their way out of a speeding ticket with a male police officer?" (mean = 1.55).

Respondents revealed their perceptions of butch privilege in several questions. "Who is more likely to buy beauty products?" (mean = 4.46). "Who is more likely to be a biological mother?" (mean = 4.19). "Who is more likely to be responsible for child rearing?" (mean = 3.92). "Who is more likely to be the aggressor in a domestic violence situation?" (mean = 3.78). "Who is more likely to hang out with their friends, even when they have family responsibilities?" (mean = 3.52). "Who is more likely to be interest in the latest style in clothes, shoes, makeup and fashion in general?" (mean = 4.24). "Who is more likely to have someone offer to change their flat tire?" (mean = 4.58). "Who is more likely to do the majority of the housework?" (mean = 3.76). "Who is more likely to be hired as a construction worker?" (mean = 4.60). "Who is more likely to be hired as a secretary?" (mean = 4.73). "Who is more likely to be an 'out' lesbian?" (mean = 4.14). "Who is more likely to be a victim of rape?" (mean = 4.35). "Who is more likely to be

the sexual aggressor in their intimate relationships?” (mean = 3.77). “Who is the more likely target of sexual harassment from a man?” (mean = 4.03). “Who is more likely to play a sport?” (mean = 3.98).

Respondents showed no preference or perception of privilege for either woman in three questions. “Who is more likely to get a better deal when buying a car from a man?” (mean = 3.20). “Who is more likely to get better customer service from a man at the local home improvement store?” (mean = 2.54). “Who is more likely to have male friends?” (mean = 3.10).

**Table 6.1: Frequency Table – Mean Score for Butch Index**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>
Beauty Products	4.46
Biological Mother	4.19
Better Car Deal from Man	3.20
Responsible for Child Rearing	3.92
Better Customer Service from Man	2.54
Aggressor in Domestic Violence	3.78
Hangs out with Friends	3.52
Latest Style in Fashion	4.24
Help with Flat Tire	4.58
Majority of Housework	3.76
Hired as Construction Worker	4.60
Hired as Secretary	4.73
Has Male Friends	3.10
“Out” Lesbian	4.14
Victim of Rape	4.35

Sexual Aggressor in Relationship	3.77
Sexually Harassed by Men	4.03
Plays Sports	3.98
“Talk” Way Out of Speeding Ticket-Male Police Officer	1.55

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Values: 1=A is much more likely than B. 2=A is somewhat more likely than B. 3=A and B are equally as likely. 4=B is somewhat more likely than A. 5=B is much more likely than A.

Factor analysis was used to determine which butch privilege variables provided greater internal consistency and indicated multidimensionality within perceptions of butch privilege. Table 6.2 presents these results. The 19 variables that displayed a pattern of high intercorrelation and their communalities are as follows: *sports* 0.478, *beapro\_r* 0.446, *child\_r* 0.395, *domvoi* 0.381, *fashin\_r* 0.368, *sexagg* 0.335, *famres* 0.278, *jobcon* 0.266, *fltire\_r* 0.243, *biomom\_r* 0.229, *rapvic\_r* 0.218, *hsewrk\_r* 0.198, *jobsec\_r* 0.197, *spticm* 0.193, *outles* 0.125, *sexhrm\_r* 0.119, *carman* 0.109, *malefrd* 0.070, *cusrvm* 0.006 (which was incorporated for consistency of male centered questions) were included in the final butch privilege scale. Communalities indicate the total variance that is shared by two or more factors; the higher the value of the communality the closer the association of the variables the less variance that exists between them.

The resulting factor analysis corresponded with a reliability analysis of the same variables. The 11 variables that were included in the original survey but were removed during the formation of the final scale due to their lack of internal consistency are as follows: *htevic\_r* 0.175, *profmn* 0.099, *shvleg* 0.050, *sexhrw\_r* 0.033, *lesbi* 0.031, *bisex\_r*

0.013, spticw 0.012, profwm 0.010, carwm 0.007, cursvw 0.007, eqedu 0.003. The Cronbach's alpha of the final scale was .760, indicating a moderate internal consistency.

**Table 6.2: Factor Analysis of Butch Index**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Communality</b>
Sports	0.478
Beapro_r	0.446
Child_r	0.395
Domvoi	0.381
Fashin_r	0.368
Sexagg	0.335
Famres	0.278
Jobcon	0.266
Fltire_r	0.243
Biomom_r	0.229
Rapvic_r	0.218
Hsewrk_r	0.198
Jobsec_r	0.197
Spticm	0.193
Htevic_r	0.175
Outles	0.125
Sexhrm_r	0.119
Carman	0.109
Profmn	0.099
Malefrd	0.070
Shvleg	0.050
Sexhrw_r	0.033
Lesbi	0.031
Bisex_r	0.013

**Table 6.2: Factor Analysis of Butch Index**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Communality</b>
Spticw	0.012
Profwm	0.010
Carwm	0.007
Cursvw	0.007
Cusrvm	0.006
Eqedu	0.003

Table 6.3 presents the correlations for these four scales further demonstrating the external validity of the newly created butch index. The same findings appear as in the regression analysis. The homophobic scale was not significantly correlated with the butch index ( $r=.081$ ). The masculine scale was significantly correlated with the butch index ( $r=.146$ ). Again, the fem scale was the most significantly correlated with the butch index ( $r= -.169$ ).

**Table 6.3: Bivariate Correlation of Butch Index & Three Independent Variable Scales**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Correlation</b>
Fem Scale	-.169
Homophobia Scale	.081
Masc Scale	.146



Oneway ANOVA was performed using the butch index and various background variables to determine who is most and least likely to recognize butch privilege. A series of tables 6.4-6.15 display these findings.

In terms of gender, Table 6.4 shows that women are more likely to have higher perceptions of butch privilege (mean=72.97) than men (mean=71.85). In Table 6.5 blacks are more likely to have higher perceptions of butch privilege (mean=74.62) than whites (mean=71.68). Table 6.6 shows that Non-heterosexuals are more likely to have a higher perception of butch privilege (mean=73.56) than heterosexuals (mean=72.51). Relationship status has little effect on perceptions of butch privilege as shown in Table 6.7. There was little difference between individuals in married or marriage-like relationships (mean=72.43) and single individuals (mean=72.73).

**Table 6.4: Oneway ANOVA of Butch Index and Gender**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Mean (n)</b>
Male	71.85 (62)
Female	72.97 (151)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>72.65 (213)</b>

**Table 6.5: Oneway ANOVA of Butch Index and Race**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Mean (n)</b>
White	71.68 (60)
Black	74.62

(99)

<b>Totals</b>	73.51 (159)
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**Table 6.6: Oneway ANOVA of Butch Index and Sexuality**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Mean (n)</b>
Heterosexual	72.51 (179)
Non-Heterosexual	73.56 (32)
<b>Totals</b>	72.67 (211)

**Table 6.7: Oneway ANOVA of Butch Index and Relationship Status**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Mean (n)</b>
Married or Marriage Like Relationship	72.43 (54)
Single	72.73 (158)
<b>Totals</b>	72.65 (213)

Table 6.8 shows that working (mean=73.83) and working/middle class (mean=73.65) have the highest perceptions of butch privilege. The upper class has the least perceptions of butch privilege (mean=70.80). Table 6.9 shows that those respondents whose fathers have less than high school education has the highest perceptions of butch privilege (mean=74.83). Individuals whose fathers have more than college education have the least likely perceptions of butch privilege (mean=69.88). The

same results are illustrated in Table 6.10 for their mothers level of education. Those respondents whose mother's education level was less than high school have higher perceptions of butch privilege (mean=76.50). While those whose mothers had more than a college education are less likely to have perceptions of butch privilege (mean=70.76).

**Table 6.8: Oneway ANOVA of Butch Index and Social Class**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Mean (n)</b>
Working Class	73.83 (35)
Working/Middle Class	73.65 (78)
Middle Class	71.96 (57)
Middle/Upper Class	70.76 (38)
Upper Class	70.80 (5)
<b>Totals</b>	72.65 (213)

**Table 6.9: Oneway ANOVA of Butch Index and Father's Education Level**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Mean (n)</b>
Less than High School	74.83 (6)
High School	73.40 (55)
Some College/Associates	72.57 (30)
College Graduate	73.54

	(68)
More than College	69.88 (42)
<b>Totals</b>	72.63 (201)

**Table 6.10: Oneway ANOVA of Butch Index and Mother's Education Level**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Mean (n)</b>
Less than High School	76.50 (4)
High School	74.06 (50)
Some College/Associates	72.17 (41)
College Graduate	72.53 (83)
More than College	70.76 (29)
<b>Totals</b>	72.66 (207)

In terms of religiosity, Table 6.11 demonstrates that individuals who attend church several times a year (mean=74.40) and once a month (mean=74.40) are equally as likely to have the highest perceptions of butch privilege. The least likely to have perceptions of butch privilege were individuals who never attended religious service (mean= 69.31). Table 6.12 shows that individuals with liberal/moderate/none fundamental religious views (mean=72.79) have a slightly higher perception of butch privilege than individuals with fundamental religious views (mean=71.84). Table 6.13

shows that individuals whose religious affiliation is not very strong have a greater likelihood of high perceptions of butch privilege (mean=74.69), while those with no religious affiliation are least likely to recognize butch privilege (mean=70.67).

**Table 6.11: Oneway ANOVA of Butch Index and Religious Service Attendance**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Mean (n)</b>
Never	69.31 (26)
Less than once a year	70.52 (21)
Once a year	73.30 (23)
Several times a year	74.40 (43)
Once a month	74.40 (20)
Two-Three times a month	72.64 (22)
Nearly every week	72.54 (24)
Every week	71.60 (15)
More than once a week	73.71 (17)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>72.62 (211)</b>

**Table 6.12: Oneway ANOVA of Butch Index and Fundamental Religious Views**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Mean (n)</b>
Liberal/Moderate/None	72.79 (164)
Fundamental	71.84 (38)
<b>Totals</b>	72.61 (202)

**Table 6.13: Oneway ANOVA of Butch Index and Strength of Religious Affiliation**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Mean (n)</b>
Strong	72.44 (61)
Not Very Strong	74.69 (21)
Somewhat Strong	73.00 (70)
No Affiliation	70.67 (43)
<b>Totals</b>	72.65 (210)

In terms of politics, Table 6.14 shows that individuals with conservative political views are most likely to recognize butch privilege (mean=74.12). While the extremely conservative have the least likelihood of recognizing butch privilege (mean=67.67). Table 6.15 illustrates that individuals who are strong democrats are the most likely to have higher perceptions of butch privilege (mean=75.45). Individuals who are strong republicans are the least likely to recognize butch privilege (mean=69.20).

**Table 6.14: Oneway ANOVA of Butch Index and Political Views**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Mean (n)</b>
Extremely Liberal	72.10 (21)
Liberal	72.25 (63)
Slightly Liberal	73.62 (21)
Moderate	73.03 (64)
Slightly Conservative	71.50 (14)
Conservative	74.12 (17)
Extremely Conservative	67.67 (3)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>72.66 (203)</b>

**Table 6.15: Oneway ANOVA of Butch Index and Political Party ID**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Mean (n)</b>
Strong Democrat	75.45 (44)
Moderate Democrat	73.21 (63)
Independent Near Democrat	72.09 (32)
Independent	71.09 (35)
Independent Near Republican	69.71

	(7)
Moderate Republican	70.45 (20)
Strong Republican	69.20 (5)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>72.67</b> <b>(206)</b>

Table 6.16 displays the two way ANOVA of butch index, sex and race. Whites (mean=71.68) have less perceptions of butch privilege than blacks (74.62). White males have the least perception of butch privilege (mean=71.11), followed by white females (mean=71.93). Black females have the highest perception of butch privilege (mean=75.17). Black males are higher than all whites but trail black females in their perception of butch privilege (74.62). Any privilege is least visible to those who have some privilege.

**Table 6.16: Two Way ANOVA of Butch Index, Sex and Race**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Sex ID</b>	<b>Mean (n)</b>
Male	White	71.11 (18)
	Black	72.88 (24)
	Total	72.12 (42)
Female	White	71.93 (42)
	Black	75.17



		(75)
	Total	74.01 (117)
<b>Total</b>	White	71.68 (60)
	Black	74.62 (99)
	Total	73.51 (159)

Regression correlation and analyses were performed to test the external validity of the newly created butch index. The three scales, which were the independent variables, have been previously tested for validity and reliability (Davis & Smith 2002: Herek 1988: Thompson & Pleck 1986).

Table 6.17 presents the regression analysis of the butch index onto the independent variables, fem scale, homophobic scale and masc scale. Homophobic scale was not significantly related to butch privilege and had the weakest effect on the butch index (beta= .111, b=.109). The greater the score of the masculine scale the greater the perception of butch privilege (beta=.175, b=.274). The fem scale revealed the greater the score of the fem scale the less perception of butch privilege the respondent would have (beta= -.236, b= -.325).

**Table 6.17: Regression Analysis of Butch Index & Three Independent Variable Scales**

Variable	Regression Coefficient <sup>a</sup>
Fem Scale	-.325
	-.236
Homophobe Scale	.109
	.111
Masc Scale	.275
	.175

<sup>a</sup>Unstandardized regression coefficients are listed first; standardized coefficients second

Table 6.18 presents the regression model of the butch index and numerous control variables. Model 1 includes the three independent variables scales (fem scale, homophobia scale and masc scale) and the control variable, race. In this model, the fem scale was the only significant variable (beta= -.190, b= -.265). The other variables were masc scale (beta= .084, b=.134), homophobic scale (beta=.050, b=5.018) and race (beta=.116, b=1.979). The greater the score on the fem scale, the less the score on the butch perceptions scale. Individuals who held greater traditional female roles beliefs had less perceptions of butch privilege. Model 2 added sex to Model 1. With the addition of sex, the fem scale was no longer a significant factor in predicting perceptions of butch privilege. Model 3 added sexual identification. Model 4 introduced family social class. Model 5 added political views into the regression. Model 6 introduced religious service attendance. With the exception of the fem scale in Model 1, no variables were significant when entered into the regular model, butch privilege scale.

**Table 6.18: Regression Model of Butch Index**

Variables	Regression Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
	Model 1 (n=143)	Model 2 (n=143)	Model 3 (n=143)	Model 4 (n=143)	Model 5 (n=143)	Model 6 (n=143)
Femscale	-.265	-.242	-.242	-.203	-.226	-.227
	-.190	-.173	-.173	-.145	-.162	-.162
Homophob	5.018	2.936	2.955	2.674	-2.606	-6.822
	.050	.029	.030	.027	-.026	-.068
Mascscal	.134	.169	.170	.175	.173	.173
	.084	.106	.106	.110	.109	.108
Race2 (1=Black)	1.979	1.971	1.970	1.029	1.898	1.1496
	.116	.116	.116	.061	.112	.088
Sex2 (1=Female)		1.416	1.417	1.592	1.492	1.219
		.076	.076	.086	.080	.066
SexID2 (1=non-heterosexual)			1.748	8.832	.127	-9.045
			.001	.000	.005	.000
Social class				-1.151	-1.109	-1.178

		-0.145	-0.140	-0.149
Polyviews			.671	.558
			.126	.105
Attend				.340
				.100

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## **DISCUSSION**

This exploratory study of the perceptions of gender and privilege has brought to light several interesting points. Although the project was a quantitative analysis some qualitative comments have been included to further clarify the reasoning behind participant's responses. During the factor analysis on the butch index, several items were omitted due to their low intercorrelations with the rest of the scale. Most of these items dealt with the way women treated others. Surprisingly, women were not thought to be capable of discrimination or sexual harassment. One respondent wrote, "Women appear to be less biased and treat everyone equally." This perception is just one example of how social construction works to normalize society and lasts throughout one's lifetime.

People are socialized to believe that women are kind nurturers, mothers and caregivers, incapable of sexual harassment, discrimination or having biases. As is presented in this study, it is not women in general, but only a certain kind of woman who is incapable of these negative actions. It is only the socially structured feminine women who are kind, nurturing and motherly. As is evident in the respondents comments, masculine women are seen as male, having male characteristics and traits and ultimately, which this study demonstrates, privilege. Individuals do not base their judgment on the biological sex of men and women, but their immediate recognition and judgment of their masculine or feminine gender.

### **Are Butch Lesbians perceived to have Masculine Privilege?**

This exploratory study provides support that butch lesbians are perceived to have of privilege based solely on their masculinity. The quantitative results of the analysis along with respondent comments make clear that an individual's gender, whether it masculine or feminine, are the elements that are initially seen and that subsequently direct

actions between individuals. Butch lesbians were perceived to be masculine therefore they were given privileges based on their masculinity.

**If so, how do such perceptions of privilege differ among the addressed areas of Career/Income, Service/Treatment, Mainstream Fashion/Beauty, Traditional Gender Roles, Sexuality and Crime?**

The questions in the survey were grouped together based on five different areas of societal life. At the end of each quantitative section, respondents were given the opportunity to qualitatively express the reasoning behind their answers. Their written responses provided a great deal of insight into their perceptions of privilege. The following explores how the respondents answers varied among the five different areas.

In Career/Income respondents overwhelmingly reported that the butch lesbian was not suited to be a secretary and vice versa, the femme lesbian was not suited for construction work. Interestingly, not a single respondent said that the butch lesbian could be hired as a secretary and only a few reported that the feminine lesbian would be hired as a construction worker. A respondent added to the secretary question: "A is a woman and most women are viewed as better secretaries." One respondent stated: "Men's role is more associated with high paying jobs and outdoor working conditions." Another respondent reported: "B (the more masculine lesbian) might make more money because she's masculine, men make more money than women." These responses suggest that the respondents did not see the individual's biological sex when viewing the photo but her gender, masculine or feminine.

In Service/Treatment area, respondents showed no preference or perception of privilege for either woman. The majority did not think the butch lesbian would receive more help in a customer service setting than the femme lesbian. There were several

comments included in this section on how the feminine woman was seen as helpless and needing more help than the masculine woman. One respondent felt: “A appears to not be as handy and would probably appear to need extra help in home improvement store and with the tire.” Another respondent added: “B would probably get less customer service because she looks masculine and men stereotypically go to home improvement stores more often and would know what they were looking for.” One other comment about Service/Treatment: “They appear as man and woman. Feminine people (females) get more help/attention than masculine people.”

Even though respondents showed no preference or perceptions of privilege in the statistical analysis, their comments are revealing. What would seem to be a privilege, getting more or better service or treatment, is not really if it is based on the perception that feminine women are incapable left to their own devices. In turn, this would be an indication of butch privilege because the butch lesbian does not get the help or service due to the fact that she is seen as masculine (aka: a man) therefore is more capable, requiring no extra help.

In the area of Crime, the perception is that butch lesbians are less likely to be victims of sexual assault and more likely to be aggressors in domestic violence. These views relate directly to a traditional ideal of masculinity. As discussed earlier Carbado (2000) outlines his gender privileges: “I can walk in public, alone, without fear of being sexually violated...” This perception offers the butch lesbian freedom and privilege over feminine women; freedom to enjoy increased mobility without self-monitoring time and place. One respondent commented: “B just seems more male in general so follows male stereotypes.” Another noted: “More feminine women may be more often victims because

they are not perceived as tough. A is more likely to be viewed as weak by someone who is physically strong.”

Respondents showed perceptions of butch privilege in the Traditional Gender Role area. They quickly categorized the two women into the roles of men and women. The comments gave insight into how society associates housework and mothering with female while males usually play sports and hang out with their friends. One respondent commented: “The butch is the man of the house.” Another said: “More feminine women are considered to have a mother’s intuition.” The last respondent commented: “A is more feminine and therefore is suppose [sic] to take the ‘woman’s’ role while B would more likely take the male role (sports, friendship, etc.)”

The Sexuality area also offered a greater perception of butch privilege. Respondents reported that the more masculine lesbian is more dominant while the feminine lesbian is more submissive and reserved. In theory, this freedom should privilege butch lesbians to be more open and forthcoming about their sex and their sexuality while it relegates feminine lesbians to be more docile and reserved. One respondent commented: “Masculine women take on roles of men. Men are usually the sexual aggressors in relationships. So masculine females would do the same.” Additional comments by another respondent: “A seems she would be more timid and reserved about who she is. The butch lesbian looks more like a lesbian and may be more of the male role, the aggressor.”

The final area of Beauty/Fashion also brought about perceptions of butch privilege from the respondents. Even though they overwhelmingly thought that A (the



feminine lesbian) would be more in tune with fashion and beauty these broader assumptions could act to privilege the butch lesbian even further. These perceptions may give butch lesbians greater permission where some of them could act on such wider boundaries. Some, however, will not experience this lack of concern. Even with wider boundaries, they may be concerned with beauty and fashion for a variety of reasons (age, religion, family, class or geographical region, etc.) than samples' perceptions of their expansion. A comment from a respondent illustrates the point: "Femmes are supposed to be into the girly stuff and butches are not suppose to be girly." This freedom from "girliness" could possibly allow the butch lesbian to not be persuaded by the latest styles and fashion that drive our capitalist society.

### **Perceiving Butch Privilege**

As shown in the correlations with the three other tested scales (feminine scale, homophobia scale and masculine scale) the butch scale was significantly correlated with only the feminine scale and masculine scale. As expected, individuals who scored higher on the fem scale indicating they held beliefs that were oriented towards more traditional female gender roles were less likely to perceive butch privilege. Individuals who scored higher on the masculine scale held beliefs that were strongly related to traditional male gender roles and more likely to have high perceptions of butch privilege. The reason these two scales were significant is directly related to an individual's recognition of their own biases. It is not surprising that individuals who hold traditional female gender roles have lower perceptions of butch privilege. Such privilege is not based on an expanded view of traditional female gender roles. Individuals who hold greater traditional female gender roles beliefs are likely to see butch lesbians as breaking their female gender role boundaries and therefore are not as likely to receive privilege due to this rupture.

Because butch privilege is based solely on the butch lesbian's masculinity, individuals who hold traditional masculine gender role beliefs are more likely to recognize masculinity without regard of biological sex. This recognition steers an individual's action and reaction when presented with a butch lesbian.

In terms of race and gender, the predictable hierarchal structure was recreated in the recognition of butch privilege. Black women were the most likely to recognize butch privilege, followed by black men, white women and lastly white men. As established in the previous discussion of privilege, the existence of privilege is convoluted in that one can hold privilege in one aspect of their identity and not in another.

It is not surprising, then, that black women recognize privilege more easily than others due to several concurrent factors. In the hierarchal ladder of privilege they occupy the last rung. They are not only oppressed by their race, but through their gender as well. Their lack of privilege in our society and the beliefs that are commonly held regarding traditional gender roles leads to their increased recognition of butch privilege (Lorde, 1984).

Black women hold a wider array of roles within their social networks and interpersonal relationships, and comprise the overwhelming majority the majority of female-headed households and single mothers (Hill Collins, 1991). They are the main breadwinners and support their entire family. Such non-traditional female roles allow black women to have a far greater allowance for acceptable female behavior (hooks, 1981; Hill Collins, 1991). They are not so closely aligned with traditional female gender roles, expressing more non-traditional female gender role beliefs.

While holding broad views of appropriate female gender roles, black women, as well as black men, are aligned with stronger traditional male gender role beliefs. As previously expressed by Weber (1996), traditional masculinity is one of the common elements possessed by those with lower socioeconomic class and lower educational attainment regardless of sex. This is due to the group's limited access to privilege in any other form. With blacks more likely to be of lower socioeconomic class and lower educational attainment it is not surprising that they hold strong traditional masculine gender role beliefs. Therefore, their holding of more broad views of traditional female roles and more strict traditional male gender role beliefs leads to greater recognition of butch privilege which, in turn, is directly related to masculinity.

The complexity of privilege provides that while black men are oppressed for their race, they do hold some privilege through their gender. Male privilege does exist in the African American community (Hill Collins, 1991). This explains why black males are one step above black women on the privilege hierarchy and are, therefore, slightly less likely to recognize butch privilege than black women.

It is possible that the complex organization of privilege is responsible for blacks recognizing butch privilege more than whites. However, it is the same organization of privilege that explains why white women are only slightly more likely to recognize butch privilege than white men. Due to their color women receive privilege but they experience discrimination and oppression due to their gender. But because of privilege based on their skin color, white women see less privilege than black women or men.

Whites see less privilege than any other group, as a whole. Invisibility is an embedded element of white privilege. This invisibility is passed on intergenerationally to perpetuate the colorless-ness of whites. The inability to recognize privilege may be a factor in why whites, in general, have lower perceptions of butch privilege. This combined with being the recipient of other types of privilege, including higher socioeconomic status and higher educational attainment, make it plausible that whites do not adhere as strongly to traditional male gender roles as blacks, which is directly correlated with butch privilege (McIntosh, 1989).

White men have the least perceptions of butch privilege. It is possible that due to the near invisibility of male privilege, it is difficult, sometimes impossible, for men to recognize any type of privilege (Wildman, 1995). White men, especially, who set social standards, hold the majority of power, financial wealth and dominate politics, governmental and religious institutions, are not likely to recognize or admit to any privilege. Such an admission could ultimately threaten the hierarchal structure of privilege that places them at the top. The denial of oppression on the part of men works to protect their privilege from alteration (McIntosh, 1989). The same holds true for the recognition of privilege - for to recognize privilege one would be forced to recognize oppression.

Continuing with the discussion of lower socioeconomic status and lower educational attainment, according to the data, individuals who identified as working class and working/middle class had the greatest perceptions of butch privilege than any other social class. Individuals whose parent's, both father and mother, education level was less than high school had the greatest recognition of butch privilege. According to Weber

(1996), this focus on traditional male gender roles provides the hierarchal structure for male privilege.

If it is this focus on traditional masculinity that provides the structure for male privilege, then butch lesbians who were seen as and identified by others as masculine and not necessarily feminine would be the recipients of the same privilege. One respondent supports such ideas when commenting that picture A (the more feminine lesbian) is a woman while B (the more masculine lesbian) appears to be a man. An individual's gender - be it masculinity or femininity - is seen first without any knowledge of their biological sex or genitalia.

Surprisingly, there was little difference in who perceived butch privilege when looking solely at sexuality. Individuals who identified as non-heterosexual were only slightly more likely to recognize butch privilege. This could have been because there was a greater focus on gender (masculinity and femininity) and less on sexuality (gay and straight). The sexuality of the women in the photographs was disclosed from the very beginning. Also, this slight difference could lend itself to the idea that other identities preclude sexuality. People identify along other guidelines, including sex and race, before they identify based on their sexuality.

### **Social Construction Theory**

Perceptions of butch privilege rest primarily on the butch lesbian's occupation of her masculinity and not her biological sex. Social construction theory provides the perspective that gender, which focuses on masculinity and femininity, is socially constructed. These characteristics are not grounded in biology but are rooted in society.

As shown in this project, individuals base their actions and reactions to gender without regard for a person's biological sex.

Markers that signify gender are the elements used to identify and categorize individuals. It is through this identification and categorization process that individuals are assigned social privilege: masculine above feminine, white above black. Respondents sorted these two lesbians into presented masculine and feminine, and responded to questions accordingly. This is no different than the sorting and classification that happen in our daily lives.

In this study, way of dress and demeanor marked individuals according to their socially constructed gender and not by way of biological sex. As illustrated, masculine lesbians are perceived as men therefore elevating them to the ranks of male privilege. Social construction allows this privilege based on masculinity, which is one of the core identity markers for the butch lesbian.

## **LIMITATIONS**

The very nature of this project speaks to its limitations. Exploratory research has inherent weaknesses. One of the major weaknesses is the issue of external validity. The extent to which this project is generalizable to other settings, populations or time periods is limited.

The sample is an issue for this project. The use of a convenience sample of undergraduate students is extremely restrictive. The size of the sample is also of notable concern. It is difficult to explain different factors throughout this study due to such a small sample. This size of sample constitutes a very narrow basis from which to

generalize about human behavior. A larger probability sample in a more diverse setting may have yielded more reliable information.

It is possible the scale created for this project does not measure the dependent variable butch privilege accurately. I devised this scale based on my knowledge of the literature and my personal experience within the lesbian community. The scale is not perfected or verified but was created as part of this exploratory research examining butch privilege. The exploratory nature of the study along with the newly created scale provides insight into why OLS regression did not reveal considerable results.

This thesis focuses solely on white butch privilege. The pictures provided to examine the perceptions of butch privilege were of two white lesbians. No other race or ethnicities were considered when defining white butch privilege. The majority of the sample participating in this project racially identified themselves as black. Even though it could be assumed that white masculinity is well known to all participants such a discrepancy could result in a liability for this exploratory study and skew the results in an unforeseeable manner.

## **CONCLUSION**

This project focused on perceptions of butch privilege in mainstream society. Butch privilege is a social phenomenon that has been anecdotally referred to within the lesbian community. Butch privilege is similar to a traditional definition of privilege in that it is a special advantage or favor granted. This unearned and unacknowledged privilege is possessed by butch lesbians and is rooted within their own masculinity.

In order to investigate this topic, I conducted an exploratory quantitative survey that focused on the respondent's recognition of masculinity and status, which led to

privilege, regardless of an individual's biological sex. This survey was administered to undergraduate sociology students at Georgia State University during the summer of 2005. For this project, I created a quantitative index that measured respondent's perceptions of butch privilege. Included in this exploratory survey was an in-depth demographics section along with three independent variable scales that measured respondent's beliefs regarding traditional gender roles and their homophobia.

Guiding research questions were used rather than hypotheses due to the exploratory nature of this study. This prevented hypothesizing about the newly created and untested scale I used to measure perceptions of butch privilege. The two research questions that were the focus of this study are: 1) Are butch lesbians perceived to have masculine privilege? 2) If so, how do these perceptions of privilege differ among the addressed areas of Career/Income, Service/Treatment, Mainstream Fashion/Beauty, Traditional Gender Roles and Crime?

This study provides support that butch lesbians are seen to be privileged based on their occupation of masculinity. The data analysis along with respondent's comments made it clear that a person's gender, not biological sex, was not only recognized by others but steered respondent's actions to and responses toward the individual. To clarify the point, butch lesbians were seen as masculine and perceived as occupying roles and privileges traditionally reserved for "men."

Three previously tested scales were used as the independent variables in assessing the perceptions of butch privilege. Two scales assessed individual beliefs about traditional gender roles and one measured the respondent's homophobia. In the regression analysis, the two scales (fem scale and masc scale) were significant in predicting the



recognition of butch privilege. Those individuals who held strict traditional female gender role beliefs were less likely to recognize butch privilege. Individuals who held strict traditional male gender roles were more likely to recognize butch privilege.

How likely respondents were to recognize butch privilege was directly related to their biological sex, race and social class. Black women were the mostly likely to recognize butch privilege followed by black men and white women. White men were least likely to recognize such privilege.

The explanation for black women and men having high recognition of butch privilege is two fold. First black women are on the bottom rung of the ladder of social hierarchy. Individuals who have no privilege are more likely to recognize privilege. Secondly, black women hold broader views of traditional female roles. Which the regression analysis predicted would lead to greater recognition of butch privilege. Also, black women as well as black men hold stronger traditional beliefs in regards to male gender roles, which was shown to also be significant in the recognition of butch privilege.

White women receive privilege from their skin color while they are simultaneously oppressed for their biological sex. White women are encouraged by society to uphold traditional female gender role of mother, nurturer and housewife. For many white women being a stay-at-home mom is the standard for which to strive.

White men are at the top of the hierarchal ladder and have a difficult time recognizing any privilege especially privilege surrounding masculinity. Such recognition would also jeopardize their position on the hierarchal ladder.

The second guided research question introduced in the project was: If butch privilege is perceived how do perceptions differ among the five areas introduced:

Career/Income, Service/Treatment, Traditional Gender Roles, Sexuality and Crime.

Respondents showed recognizable perceptions of butch privilege in all categories except in the area of Service/Treatment. In this area, although the statistical analysis revealed no recognition of privilege based on butch lesbians' occupation of masculinity the respondents' comments revealed quite the opposite. Respondents stated the feminine lesbian received greater service and treatment because men saw her as incapable. This information given in the comments give clear insight to the idea that butch lesbians do not receive better or more service or treatment because their masculinity is translated into "capable male." In this case no or poor service/treatment does translate into privilege based solely on the butch lesbian's masculinity.

Social construction theory provides a framework in which gender is comprised of socially constructed markers such as dress, demeanor and style. Such markers are part of a predetermined set of socially acceptable markers that make up gender specific codes of conduct. These markers representing acceptable gender codes of conduct are used as indicators of the individual's position in the hierarchal structure of society. A butch lesbian's masculinity works to elevate her from the lower position of female to a higher position available exclusively based on one's masculinity and not one's penis.

This research is important because it works to broaden our comprehension of privilege. By exposing another aspect of privilege a new pathway of knowledge is opened for further investigation. Such a pathway may help to deepen the understanding of how privilege works, is created and recreated giving a few members of our society their invisible "knapsack" (McIntosh, 1989).

This research not only works to better understand privilege but also adds to an exploration of how socially constructed masculinity advances privilege and status. By unbuckling masculinity from the biological male it is possible to gain greater knowledge about the inner workings of male privilege.

This research into perceptions of butch privilege not only adds to the body of literature that already exists surrounding privilege, it creates an entirely new dimension. The idea that females are the recipients of male privilege due to their occupation of masculinity is a concept that academia has yet to explore. This project brings the social phenomenon that has existed in anecdotal form within the lesbian community into academia where it can be examined and investigated.

The next step in this vein of research is to administer the same instrument to a larger and more diverse, probability sample. The results from a second project using the same scales will help to verify substantial findings produced by this study. It is from the results of a second study that further research can take place with assurance that this concept exists in the state presented.

The concept of butch privilege is embryonic in nature. This project was just the exploratory beginnings of a concept that needs to be investigated and developed. There is a plethora of research still to do. This project looked solely at the perceptions of white butch privilege. Masculinity and how it is represented and presented operates differently in different cultures and ethnic groups. There is a vast amount of research to be done surrounding minority cultures such as black butch lesbians, Hispanic butch lesbians, and Asian butch lesbians and the masculinity that they occupy.

The extent to which butch privilege exists should be further explored in all races and ethnic groups. Research needs to focus on areas such as same sex domestic violence, parenting roles and domestic partner duties. This type of research holds a wealth of information and insight into how interpersonal relationships are formed and operate and how privilege is developed and disseminated within relationships.

Lastly, further research surrounding butch privilege needs to concentrate on the *lesbian* community. A qualitative project investigating perceptions lesbians have in regards to “some of their own” would reveal a great amount of data regarding the lives and experiences of butch women and their lovers, partners, friends and family. This thesis research begs continued, more intimate *and* more broad consideration of the butch privilege phenomenon.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A**

Georgia State University  
Department of Sociology  
Informed Consent

**Title:** “Excuse me, Ma’am. That’s Sir to You”: Perceptions of Butch Privilege in Contemporary Society.

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Denise A. Donnelly and Mikel Walters

#### **Introduction**

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to identify differences in perceptions of treatment and services between feminine lesbians and masculine lesbians.

#### **Procedures:**

You will be asked to fill out a questionnaire. In this questionnaire, you will be asked to answer questions about two different lesbians depicted in separate photographs. In addition, you will be asked to answer questions addressing traditional gender roles and homophobia.

This research is only being conducted at Georgia State University. You will only be asked to participate in this study one time. There will be approximately 200 people involved in this study. The questionnaire should take approximately 25-30 minutes to complete.

#### **Risks**

There are no risks or discomforts to participants. Students not participating will be asked to turn in a blank survey so that they will not be singled out.

#### **Benefits**

You will not directly benefit from this study, although you may find the study interesting and though provoking. Society will benefit from a greater understanding of gender role stereotypes.

#### **Confidentiality**

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. We will use a case number rather than your name on study records where we can. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally. Surveys will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. We are the only people with the key. All data will be stored in a password-protected computer. We are the only people with the password.

**Compensation**

There will be no compensation received by you for your participation.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions at any time about this study or the questionnaire, you may contact Dr. Denise A. Donnelly at 404-651-1852 or Mikel Walters at 404-966-1244.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees the protection of human research participants. Susan Vogtner, in the Office of Research Integrity, can be reached at 404-463-0674.

**Participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your questionnaire will be destroyed.

A copy of the consent form will be provided to you upon request.

If you wish to participate in this study please sign your name below. If you don't wish to participate please turn in the blank survey to the facilitator.

**Consent**

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**“Excuse me Ma’am. That’s Sir to You”**  
**Perceptions of Butch Privilege in**  
**Contemporary Society**

**Recruitment Script:**

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study. This study is designed to identify differences in perceptions of treatment and services between feminine lesbians and masculine lesbians.

The survey is broken down into three different sections. The first section contains a series of multiple-choice questions. You will be asked to answer questions about two different lesbians depicted in separate photographs. The questions are grouped by category with a small narrative section at the end of each category. This is an opportunity for you to explain the main reason for your answers.

The next section is a short demographics section. The questions here revolve around age, race, sex, sexual identification, education, family, religious and political beliefs.

The last section is also a series of multiple-choice questions. The questions inquire about your beliefs regarding traditional gender roles and homosexuality.

The questionnaire will take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete. Please read over the informed consent form. If you wish to participate in this survey please sign your name at the bottom of the consent form, turn the page and begin the survey. If you do not wish to participate, please turn in a blank survey. Please hand me your questionnaires when you are finished.

Are there any questions?

Thank you for your participation.



**A**



**B**



10. Who is more likely to be able to “talk” their way out of a speeding ticket with a male police officer?	1 2 3 4 5
11. Who is more likely to be able to “talk” their way out of a speeding ticket with a female police officer?	1 2 3 4 5
12. Who is more likely to have someone offer to change their flat tire?	1 2 3 4 5
<p>Please explain the main reason for your answers to the preceding questions in space provided below.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
13. Who is more likely to be a victim of rape?	1 2 3 4 5
14. Who is the more likely target of sexual harassment from a man?	1 2 3 4 5
15. Who is the more likely target of sexual harassment from a woman?	1 2 3 4 5
16. Who is more likely to be the aggressor in a domestic violence situation?	1 2 3 4 5
17. Who is more likely to be the victim of a hate crime?	1 2 3 4 5
<p>Please explain the main reason for your answers to the preceding questions in space provided below.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

<p>18. Who is more likely to do the majority of the housework?</p> <p>19. Who is more likely to be responsible for child rearing?</p> <p>Please explain the main reason for your answers to the preceding questions in space provided below.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>
<p>20. Who is more likely to be a biological mother?</p> <p>21. Who is more likely to have male friends?</p> <p>22. Who is more likely to hang out with their friends, even when they have family responsibilities?</p> <p>23. Who is more likely to play a sport?</p> <p>Please explain the main reason for your answers to the preceding questions in space provided below.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>
<p>24. Who is more likely to identify as bisexual?</p> <p>25. Who is more likely to identify as a lesbian?</p> <p>26. Who is more likely to be an “out” lesbian?</p> <p>27. Who is more likely to be the sexual aggressor in their intimate relationships?</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>



Please explain the main reason for your answers to the preceding questions in space provided below.	
_____	
_____	
_____	
_____	

28. Who is more likely to buy beauty products?	1 2 3 4 5
29. Who is less likely to shave their legs?	1 2 3 4 5
30. Who is more likely to be interested in the latest style in clothes, shoes, makeup and fashion in general?	1 2 3 4 5
Please explain the main reason for your answers to the preceding questions in space provided below.	
_____	
_____	
_____	
_____	

**Tell me about yourself (mark only one answer)**

<p>How old are you? _____</p> <p>Biological Sex:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Female</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Male</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other, _____.</p> <p>Sexual Identity:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Homosexual</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Heterosexual</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bi-sexual</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other, _____.</p>	<p>Race:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Asian</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Black</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Latino/a</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Multiracial</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> White</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other, _____.</p> <p>Married or Marriage like Relationship?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
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<p>Religious Affiliation: _____.</p> <p>Religious Views:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fundamentalist</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Moderate</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Liberal</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> None</li> </ul> <p>Strength of Religious Affiliation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Strong</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Not very strong</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat strong</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> No affiliation</li> </ul> <p>How often do you attend a place of worship?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Never</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a year</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Once a year</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Several times a year</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Once a month</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Two-three times a month</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Nearly every week</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Every week</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> More than once a week</li> </ul> <p>Current Level of Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Freshman</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sophomore</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Junior</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Senior</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Graduate Student</li> </ul>	<p>Mother's or Guardian's Highest Year of Education Completed:_____.</p> <p>Father's or Guardian's Highest Year of Education Completed:_____.</p> <p>The Family You Grew Up in Social Class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Working Class</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Working/Middle Class</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Middle Class</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Middle/Upper Class</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Upper Class</li> </ul> <p>Political Party Affiliation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Strong Democrat</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Moderate Democrat</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Independent near Democrat</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Independent</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Independent near Republican</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Moderate Republican</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Strong Republican</li> </ul> <p>Political Views</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Extremely liberal</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Liberal</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Slightly Liberal</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Moderate</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Slightly Conservative</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conservative</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Extremely Conservative</li> </ul>
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**Circle the most appropriate answer (Choose only one)****Answer Key**

1= Strongly Agree

2= Agree

3= Unsure

4= Disagree

5= Strongly Disagree

1. Lesbians just can't fit into our society.	1	2	3	4	5
2. A woman's homosexuality should not be a cause for job discrimination in any situation.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Female homosexuality is bad for society because it breaks down the natural division between the sexes.	1	2	3	4	5
4. State laws against private sexual behavior between consenting adult women should be abolished.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Female homosexuality is a sin.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The growing number of lesbians indicates a decline in American morals.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Female homosexuality in itself is no problem unless society makes it a problem.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Female homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic social institutions.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Female homosexuality is an inferior form of sexuality.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Lesbians are sick.	1	2	3	4	5
11. It is essential for a man to always have the respect and admiration of everyone who knows him.	1	2	3	4	5
12. A man should always think everything out coolly and logically, and have rational reasons for everything he does.	1	2	3	4	5
13. A good motto for a man would be "When the going gets tough, the tough get going."	1	2	3	4	5

14. I think a young man should try to become physically tough, even if he's not big.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Fists are sometimes the only way to get out of a bad situation.	1	2	3	4	5
16. A real man enjoys a bit of danger now and then.	1	2	3	4	5
17. In some kinds of situations a man should be ready to use his fists.	1	2	3	4	5
18. It is okay if a married woman earns money in business or industry if she has a husband capable of supporting her.	1	2	3	4	5
19. A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who doesn't work.	1	2	3	4	5
20. It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.	1	2	3	4	5
21. If the husband in a family wants children, but the wife decides that she does not want any children, it is all right for the wife to refuse to have children.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Women should take care of running their homes and leave running the country up to men.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Women are not emotionally suited for politics.	1	2	3	4	5
24. If my party nominated a woman for President, I would vote for her if she were qualified for the job.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Employers should make special efforts to hire and promote qualified women.	1	2	3	4	5
26. A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.	1	2	3	4	5
27. All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person.	1	2	3	4	5

**Appendix B**

“Status Norm” subscale of Male Role Norm Scale (Thompson and Pleck 1986)

1. It is essential for a man to always have the respect and admiration of everyone who knows him.
2. A man should always think everything out coolly and logically, and have rational reasons for everything he does.

“Toughness” subscale of Male Role Norm Scale (Thompson and Pleck 1986)

1. A good motto for a man would be “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.”
2. I think a young man should try to become physically tough, even if he’s not big.
3. Fists are sometimes the only way to get out of a bad situation.
4. A real man enjoys a bit of danger now and then.
5. In some kinds of situations a man should be ready to use his fists.

## Appendix C

### Attitudes Towards Women Scale

1. It is okay if a married woman earns money in business or industry if she has a husband capable of supporting her.
2. A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.
3. It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.
4. If the husband in a family wants children, but the wife decides that she does not want any children, it is all right for the wife to refuse to have children.
5. Women should take care of running their homes and leave running the country up to men.
6. Women are not emotionally suited for politics.
7. If my party nominated a woman for President, I would vote for her if she were qualified for the job.
8. Employers should make special efforts to hire and promote qualified women.
9. A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.
10. All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job.
11. Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person.

**Appendix D**

“Lesbian Homophobia” subscale of Revised Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gays (Herek 1984)

1. Lesbians just can't fit into our society.
2. A woman's homosexuality should not be a cause for job discrimination in any situation.
3. Female homosexuality is bad for society because it breaks down the natural division between the sexes.
4. State laws against private sexual behavior between consenting adult women should be abolished.
5. Female homosexuality is a sin.
6. The growing number of lesbians indicates a decline in American morals.
7. Female homosexuality in itself is no problem unless society makes it a problem.
8. Female homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic social institutions.
9. Female homosexuality is an inferior form of sexuality.
10. Lesbians are sick.