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He/She Butch on Butch Butch Bottoms Woman Friends Fag-Identified Bears  
Girls Dating Butchest Understand Femmes Alpha Butch Straight Men Androgyny  
Fag Play Underwear Safety Emotion Machismo Blur Body Language History BoB  
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# Butch

## A Round Table

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**You've seen me in  
a dress and I still  
come off as butch.  
Just a damned  
ugly girl!  
A manly girl.**

## Featuring:

**Oso  
A.M. Salt  
Judith Black  
Margo Mercedes Rivera**

Assumptions Working Class Tough  
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Class Tough Comfort Identity Manly  
Girl Butch Identity Men's Clothing  
Stone Cars Sticks Freaks Passing Boys

A: Hi, I'm A. I'm an unemployed writer, been butch all my life, never changed. Grew up working class.

O: I'm Oso, and I'm one of the FaT GiRL collective members. I identify as a stone butch, I've been for as long as I can remember - always. I'm ecstatic to be talking about butch/femme stuff, or butch/whatever stuff. Butch stuff.

M: I'm Margo. I'm also a member of the FaT GiRL collective, and also butch as long as I can remember. I grew up working class, and of mixed race.

J: I'm Judith Black I'm working class, butch dyke, in the Bay Area, and I have nothing to say for myself. That'll change.

O: I forgot to say I'm working class. So, how do you know you're butch, and what does that mean to you?

M: Well, a woman asked me that once, and I was extremely irritated, because I thought it very obvious that I was butch. It wasn't a matter of "how did I know that I was butch." I was just butch. It's just who I am. I've always been like this . . . I haven't always had the words to know what it meant, and then I got those words, and the whole framework - it was a huge relief. But I've always just been this way. I've always liked sticks and things. I've always followed my father around and worn his clothes.

A: Yeah, I've always just felt butch, too. I've always liked men's clothing, really hated being kind of encouraged to wear lacy, frilly things, which my family kept trying to do for quite a long while. I don't know. It doesn't have much to do with what I happen to be wearing. You've seen me in a dress, and I still come off as butch.

O: Just a damned ugly girl!

A: A manly girl.

O: I've always worn boys' clothes, and all of that, but even not in guys' clothes, I'd still be butch. I don't know that I have the words to say what I think it is that makes me determine that I'm butch, but it definitely doesn't matter what I'm wearing. I care what I'm wearing, and I like to dress a certain way—that is like a guy, but I know that even outside of that, I would still definitely be butch. I had long hair a long time when I was younger, and I've definitely been butch since I was a little kid, and even when I was forced to wear dresses and have braids and all that. I still knew that I was butch. It was a feeling - I just knew.

J: In a lot of ways, I was raised as a boy. I had two older brothers, and I was always just one of them. Everything that we did, my little brother especially, we did together. We did everything the same. I wore their clothes, their hand-me-downs. And when I see little girls now, when I've been around children, I think they really kind of force their own impression. They really insist on feminine garb or feminine behavior, so I felt I was just raised as a boy, and become one of them. It was just what I was, and it was acceptable until I hit adolescence. Then they wanted me to turn into something else, and that just wasn't going to happen.

M: I feel like it's just part of who I am. It's how I operate in the world. It's how I try to get things - that I go about it in a butch

way. It's how I use my body. I know when I was a kid I'd much rather be diving across the asphalt than be inside playing with Barbies, or anything like that. And girls were not encouraged to use their bodies. It's so much beyond clothing, but it's also about clothing.

A: I think that everyone uses clothing as a way of expressing who they are, but you can put someone who wasn't butch in the same clothes that any of us would be wearing, and they wouldn't seem butch to me. They would seem like someone who wasn't butch trying to "butch it up" or "guy it up." Being butch is a huge part of my identity, probably the biggest part of my identity. It is something that I always hold onto. I think it's how I really relate in the world, so other people, whether it's butches or femmes, or men or women, or neither, or people . . . there's a way that I put butch out there, that makes a big difference in the way people treat me and the way I treat them.

J: It's funny. It's really important to me now, but when I came out as a lesbian, I was a teenager, and the woman I came out with started calling me a butch, and I hated it. I was so offended, and I'd had that experience a bunch of times before. I think some of it had to do with where I grew up, and just how straight and narrow it was, and I didn't want to be a freak. Maybe it was just that it was the inevitable me, and I didn't want to face it. I'm not sure, but I hated it, and I really resented it. I dressed a lot harder and was a lot harder then, and really didn't see myself as looking any different than any other adolescent high school girl. Looking back, it's hilarious.

O: That still happens to me. I'm really shocked when I realize that someone's relating to me as a butch or a freak - usually straight people. I overheard some straight person saying, when I was out riding horses one day, something about me being a dagger. And I was just shocked, because I never think of people relating to me or seeing me in that way. I always just assume they're going to see me as a regular-guy type person.

M: So how much do you guys pass?

O: I pass a lot.

A: Yeah, I pass a lot, too.

O: I pass most of the time, even in dyke things now. In the last year and a half, I've gone to a lot of dyke events, and they've thought I was a boy. As a matter of fact - not yesterday, but the time before - when I went to "In Bed With Fairy Butch," they thought I was a boy at the door. It was a co-ed night, so I didn't get any flak, but they did think I was a boy. And I get cruised in the Castro all the time by fags that think I'm a young boy - all the time. And whenever I go shopping for guy clothes or boy clothes, they'll address me "sir" or "young man," "little boy." I get carded places, because they think I'm a teenage boy. I actually had

a guy try to stop me from going into an "R" rated movie, because they thought I was an underage boy trying to get into an "R" rated film.

M: It's funny. In gay situations, it's obvious, but often in very straight situations, they totally treat me like a man, and they treat me with a lot of respect, and it blows my mind how differently I get treated as a man than I do as a butch.

A: I pass a lot, too, and it's usually men who don't call me sir, and they seem pretty happy to have figured it out. 'Cause usually, when people just glance at me, they'll just assume I'm a man, particularly women - straight women. I was walking into a public restroom one day, and there was this guy walking behind me, and as I went to reach out and put my hand on the women's door, he started saying, "Women's. Women's! WOMEN'S!" to tell me that I was using the wrong bathroom.

O: Bathrooms, yeah. I do not go to the bathroom. I can never go to the bathroom in public, ever, ever, ever. Especially not in small towns or airports. It's a drag to see the . . .

J: Sometimes, it's a real pain in the ass to see the shocked expressions.

M: So we're kind of getting into the "how do you feel limited by being butch?" - The bathrooms? Bathrooms are high on the list?

A: Oh, bathrooms are like the major thing.

J: I feel real rebellious about the whole bathroom thing.

O: Really?

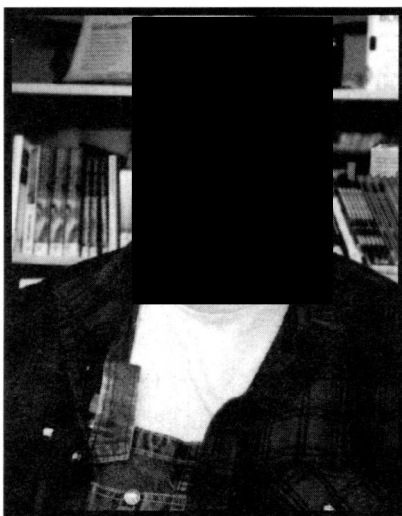
J: Oh, yeah. Like "Fuck you!" I get stared at, I get gawked at especially by children, or whispered at or about, or whatever.

O: I think there should be butch/femme bathrooms, so that femmy men and girly girls can go in one bathroom and stare at themselves, or whatever, and that men and tomboys or whatever could all go in the other bathroom.

M: The most fun bathroom time I ever had was when I was with a very large butch who was 6'3" and big, and we both went in the bathroom, and there was a straight woman in there. Her eyes bugged out and her mouth dropped open. And I was really happy to have someone else with me who was in the same situation. She was utterly horrified! But we just went in - actually we went into the same stall, so it made it worse.

J: Bathroom lines - have you ever stood in a bathroom line, like after a film lets out or something? Oh my god! People turn around and stare at you.

O: I like passing, actually, and that's one of the reasons I avoid bathrooms. If I just have to wash my hands or something like that, I'll just go to the men's bathroom. If I'm in a situation where I definitely am passing, I avoid having it turn into a situa-



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tion where I'm not passing anymore.

J: I guess I rebel against it. If a man calls me "sir," I'll turn around and call him "ma'am. I do the same thing if its a woman. I'm more nasty with the men, actually. I don't get as pissed off with a woman. If a man calls me "sir," he's definitely going to get called "ma'am."

M: It's funny, because I actually like it, and I've asked my lovers not to correct people. Because for awhile, I've had lovers saying, "No, no, she's a woman!" And I feel I get retribution from whoever's called me "sir." They're horrified that they've made the mistake, and then treat me even worse than they would have treated me if they'd noticed I was a butch to begin with. So I'd rather just let their little mistake go by.

O: I don't know that I feel like it's a mistake. I don't feel like a woman, and I don't think that there is good terminology for what we have going on, especially with pronouns. But I don't feel more like than a "she" than a "he" at all. Definitely not. In some ways, especially little kids, I think they're really seeing me for who I really am, and they're not putting on all the weirdness that comes with it. In terms of what you're really supposed to be to be a man - like what's between your legs - or a woman. I think kids are forced to see the world in these two categories, but before they start formulating that, they just sort of see people as people, and they just relate to you.

J: It happens pretty quickly, though.

O: That's one of the reasons I don't do the correcting thing. I think if I felt like a woman, then I would also feel it would be weird to always be mistaken for a man, or whatever. But since I don't . . .

J: Yeah, I think you're right. I think there's some middle ground, or some other language that we don't know, and I don't hassle children. But I guess with men, it just pisses me off. It doesn't happen so much with women. Women usually know who and what I am - they have some idea. With men, it's just that spark of anger that I don't even really have time to think about.

M: I am pretty woman-identified. It just doesn't bother me that much. The only thing that really bothers me about that whole situation is the way people get so fucking bent out of shape about it. "Oh, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry! I'm sorry!"

O: People get really close to me and talk to me, or whatever, and all of a sudden they'll think, "Wait a minute. You're not a guy! What are you doing?" Like I was somehow being this chameleon and tricking them, and now they're totally angry. I think that everyone relates to people like that. They definitely relate to men and women, and if you blur that line at all, then they feel like somehow you're being this horrible, deceitful person.

J: They just don't know how to treat you.

O: What do you feel that you can do about that?

J: You just throw it their face as much as possible, I guess. For me, it's just letting them know that I don't give a fuck what they think I am. It really doesn't matter to me.

A: I have definitely had good dialogue with some little kids. At some point, they want to know am I a boy or a girl? And for me, I'm like, "What does it matter? What difference does it make?" But I think that's because my gender identity is really not aligned with being a butch woman.

J: I don't know. I feel the same way. It doesn't really matter to me, either. The thing I would hope they would get out of the whole exchange is to maybe think about how they treat different sexes differently.

O: How does being fat impact your butch identity?

M: It makes it harder for me to pass. The fatter I get, or the bigger I am, the more I look like a woman, and also the harder it is for me because I get more hip-y - ass, hips, thighs, girl - and I have a much harder time finding clothes. I don't really fit into 501's anymore. There's just too much ass.

A: You can special order them.

M: It's not the bigness. To get them to fit my ass, they're six inches too big in the waist. It's just much harder to get men's clothes to fit, and I just look more round, so I appear less butch to the consuming public.

A: Yeah, I agree with that. I think the same holds true for me, too. There's a definite range of being fat, for me, that makes me pass more easily. If I go above

it or below it, I have curves sticking out everywhere. They're harder to hide.

J: I think in some way, people look at me less. Because I'm fat, I'm more invisible, and it makes people less likely to look at me, and try to figure out am I a guy? am I a woman? And in some way, I just become much more benign . . . when I hit a certain age, when I hit a certain weight, I just became way more invisible. Started getting a lot less shit on the streets; started getting a lot less interaction at all, out in the world, which is fine. And I interact with a lot of people's children, and the kids are fine, especially little kids.

O: I don't know about this being fat impacting my butch identity at all. If anything, I'd definitely have to say if I was a fat femme, I might have more issues . . . and this is something I talked about when we first started FaT GiRL. I definitely think that, because I'm butch, I get a lot of leeway around being fat. Like a lot of my lovers are really into it. I'm pretty bear-identified, and I think they're really into that aspect, and they're into the chunky fatness of it all. But in terms of getting bigger -

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I wake up and think,  
"I wish I wasn't  
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but I never  
wake up and say,  
"I wish I wasn't  
this butch."**

**It's almost like I get along with straight men better than I do butches.**

**And isn't that sick?!**

A: Yeah, for me, too. Butch, definitely.

M: Why?

A: I feel like being butch is something I absolutely can't change, don't want to change.

M: Like being fat is?

A: Yeah.

O: I feel like being butch is something . . . I actually have always been chubby, and then fat, But being butch seems like it's at the core of my identity. It moves with me. Everything, even when people aren't physically seeing me, like if I was on the phone with someone, or if I was having some sort of encounter over mail, that would be a place where they wouldn't see me physically. So the fact that I'm fat or not wouldn't really be a difference. I feel like I'd be butch whether I lost a lot of weight, or gained a lot of weight. So in that way, being butch is more like my eyes are brown - they are not changing. And there definitely have been times when I think I have wished to be smaller, in terms of weight, or even the fear of being too small has crossed my mind. But being butch, I've always been: that's just the way it is, and I like it. I never have butch identity crisis. There are days I wake up and think, "I wish I wasn't this size,"

if I seem less butch - I don't think so. My size hasn't changed a ton, but maybe a little bit in the last two years, I've definitely gotten bigger. I've personally had some internal issues about fat, but it never had anything to do with being butch. But I've not really reached the point where I can't fit into the clothes that I want to buy, so that hasn't been a problem. I think the bigger I got, the more I started leaning towards looking at and dealing with fat gay men who are very identified - where they shop, where they get their shirts, all that, because they have big sizes, and they're very butch - they're butch gay men. If I was smaller, I sometimes wonder how that would affect things - not if I was just a bit smaller, but if I was a lot smaller. If I was actually skinny, I think I'd still be really butch, but I don't think I'd be taken as seriously, because I'm short.

Especially if I weighed 100 pounds, or something, I'd be one of those really small, skinny little butches, that are sort of tiny, and . . .

M: Do you think you'd make less of an impact?

O: Definitely I'd make less of an impact. Absolutely.

O: Between being butch and fat, which is more important than what?

J: Butch, definitely, for me.

and never wake up and say, "I wish I wasn't this butch." I love being butch, and I don't always love being fat. I sort of say that I do, but I don't always - a lot of times, but not always.

M: I hate picking and choosing and prioritizing . . .

O: And you don't have to.

M: Yeah, I don't. I'm refusing, actually. But what I see the difference is in how I'm treated, and it really flows in different ways. If I'm in school, I'm fat enough - I guess technically, I'm super-size, 300 pounds - I'm fat enough to not fit in school desks, and at that moment, being fat is much more important, because I just don't fit. And being with my family, they're both equally horrible to them, or abhorrent to them, so at that moment they're both equally important in that way. But in terms of my own identity, they're both so intertwined in who I am that I can't say which one's more important. It's just a matter of where I am in the world and how I'm treated.

J: I think I've always been both, and I don't know. I think people take a lot more liberties talking about me being fat than they do about me being butch. Maybe that's not even true, though. I just had a consult with this doctor, and . . . he was actually really cool about it . . . he asked me if I considered weight loss. And I said, "No, I'm not interested." And we had a really cool conversation about it, and I was thinking, "Oh, yeah, there's only permission to talk about fat." But actually, in the same interview, he asked me if I was on any on-going medications, and I said, "No." And he asked me then was I taking any hormones, and I said, "No." Well that was an odd question. So actually, I'm discounting myself. I guess it's not as true as it's been in the past, that people only feel like they have permission to question my fatness and not my butchness. Both are happening, at this point.

M: Yeah, he felt like he had permission to be in your face about everything!

J: It wasn't a bad experience.

A: Usually, for doctors, when they see someone that's fat and they have facial hair, the first thing they think - that they're taught to think - is polycystic ovarian disease. I know that because my mother's a doctor, and she's convinced that my sister has it, and she's never told me that she thinks I have it, but why not? And we had a discussion about female facial hair, in a kind of an off-handed way, one day, my mother and I. She described my sister's facial hair as . . . what she said was that she had a male hair pattern. I said, "She has a female hair pattern." I mean, she's a female, and

**On almost every level, I prefer femmes-as friends, house-mates, coworkers, pretty much whatever.**

there's hair growing on her face. How is that a male hair pattern? But she just refused to believe it. It's just pounded into them.

J: That was the first time I noticed that that came up.

O: So what is good and empowering about being fat . . . Oh, I'm sorry - about being butch?

M: Oso?

O: Oh, let's see, here. Well, for me, absolutely everything about being butch - except for the bathroom, really - I love it. If I could just change the bathroom situation . . . but really, I don't have to pee very often, anyway. But anyway, for me, being butch is also somewhat related to femmes, and that's a really positive thing in my life, and almost every other aspect about being

butch. I like the look, and the feel, and sort of the whole experience. I wouldn't trade it for any other identity. A, how about you? Anything good and empowering?

A: Yeah, sometimes - this doesn't necessarily have anything to do with being butch, but maybe with passing - sometimes I enjoy fucking with people's heads that way. I do enjoy being a butch, because I'm into femmes, and I like the dynamic that results from that. That's about it. Yeah, I also wouldn't trade it. I can't imagine being anything else.

J: I've reached a place in my life, and I guess I've been here long enough that I feel really comfortable with who I am, and so really strong as a butch woman. And there really aren't any other options, so I guess that's a good thing. I feel much more strong and centered when I can dress the way I want, and do the things I want to do. I feel a lot less powerful or less able to express myself when I have to fit into a certain role - like if I have to dress a certain way to do a job, or show up at a straight wedding dressed in some semi-appropriate garb, I feel less empowered in that kind of situation. It just makes me appreciate how my life is, I guess.

O: Do you mean you go to wedding in dresses?

J: No way!!! I don't particularly - I mean I like my tuxes, but I don't particularly like to dress wearing more formal clothes. I guess I'm all extremes . . . I'm very comfortable in sweats and kind of casual clothing, and I'm very comfortable in a tux, and anything in between is pretty uncomfortable. So if I have to dress up in that kind of way, like to go to work - I generally just take jobs where I don't have to - or to go to some party or some event where that's expected, then I feel a lot less empowered and less expressed.

O: I was getting scared, there, for a minute. I thought you did

mean, like, big floral print dresses.

J: Oh, my God, no! I like floral prints, though.

Margo?

M: It's just wonderful, being butch. It's who I am. I think, just in the last few years, I've felt the freedom to be as butch as I want to be. And I really like that. I get a lot of positive things from other butches, and from femmes, and just in general. It's a good thing.

O: Yeah, you do it well. You find you get a lot of positive things from other butches? Like in what ways?



**Margo:**

**When I was with butches I felt that femmes were upset by it... I think partially because it was two more butches who were not available.**

A: Well, they're all checking my butt out, nowadays, in San Francisco.

J: Those damn queers!

M: Some of my best friends are butches, and some of my lovers have been butches. So I feel I've gotten camaraderie and sexual attention for being butch.

O: I really wish I had friends who are butches, but I don't feel like I do.

J: Why do you think that is?

O: I don't know. But I'm actually not that close to very many butches - a couple, but not that many. Do you feel like you have a lot of butch friends?

J: No, I don't have a lot of butch friends.

M: Do you have any?

J: We're good acquaintances. Yeah. No.

A: Me either. I do have one, sort of, besides you.

J: It's almost like I get along with straight men better than I do butches. And isn't that sick?!

O: I feel like there's a lot of resistance. I feel like there's just a lot of tension around starting off a friendship with other butches - especially butches my age, or around my age.

J: Why do you think that is?

O: Well, I think one thing is . . . which sort of leads us into a different question. I think that in San Francisco, which is where I live, that there's a large community of butch-on-butcht stuff going on, and that's not really something that's a part of my life.

M: BOB - butch-on-butcht - BOB.

A: See? They have their own name, now.

O: So, I think that part of it is that I'm really separate from that. I'm sort of outside of that situation, because it's not really

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something that I engage in, pretty much at all. Or at least not . . .

M: That you'll admit.

O: You know all my secrets, huh? Pretty much not at all. If I was going to, it wouldn't be in a primary situation.

M: Y'know, one of those rest stops on the side of the highway, huh?

O: Uh-huh.

J: I think that's what's "in" in San Francisco. I don't think being a butch in a relationship with another butch is "cool" at all. I think going to a party and fucking another butch is one thing . . .

O: But it seems like I know lots of butches who are in relationships with other butches, actually dating, being girlfriends, all of that. Yeah! I think there's a lot . . . they had a whole show on butch-on-butch stuff not that long ago. And I seem really outside of that. And now on the other side of that, because I identify as stone, and because I think there's a lot of stuff around who's really butch, who's "top dog," who's the butchest . . .

J: So you're going for the alpha butch.

O: Hmm?

J: The alpha butch - y'know the theory with dogs - you get a group of dogs together, there has to be the alpha dog, the top dog . . . so you have to go for the alpha butch.

O: I'm not saying that I think it's a good thing, or I think it's the only way that butches can relate, but I definitely feel it. I definitely feel that's out there, and it's a real part of my experience with butches, they seem annoyed at me for identifying as stone, and always really want to question it. I mean, even this stuff about me being with other butches, it's this whole thing: "Oh yeah, you really do it!" And also about being stone. "Oh, you really do want to get fucked, you just don't want to tell us about it." There's a lot of stuff around that, and either people feel like they have to challenge each other's butchness a lot, or there's already a definite superior/inferior thing going on.

J: With what being superior?

O: Well, there's some butch that sort of seems more butch than the other people, or the other butches that you're really into, and then there's a dynamic that's set up. I feel that has happened

to me a lot. There's a lot of resistance to having the whole butch bonding thing occur because of that stuff. You know what I mean? I don't have any kind of weirdness like that when I'm hanging out with femmes. Obviously they're not questioning anything about my butch identity. They're not feeling weird because I identify as stone butch. That doesn't call their stuff into question. I'm not saying that I think being stone butch is a supreme way to be butch, but I think there's an idea out there in the world that it's either some really weird thing, or the ultimate thing, and that either you're thinking it's really gross, or you're harboring issues. I'm not saying any of you feel that way. I'm just saying I've had that experience.

M: It's not my thing, but whatever. What I've gotten out of having other butch friends, well, one of my best friends is also Latin, also from a working class background, also fat, and also butch, and . . .

O: You're the same person!

M: No! Well, she's not mixed. But I feel like there's so little to explain. Like when Judith and I hang out, we understand each other, in a certain way.

O: I think that would be really positive, and I'm not saying I wouldn't want to have butch friends. I actually think I would like to have more butch friends.

M: Maybe you should put a friendship ad in.

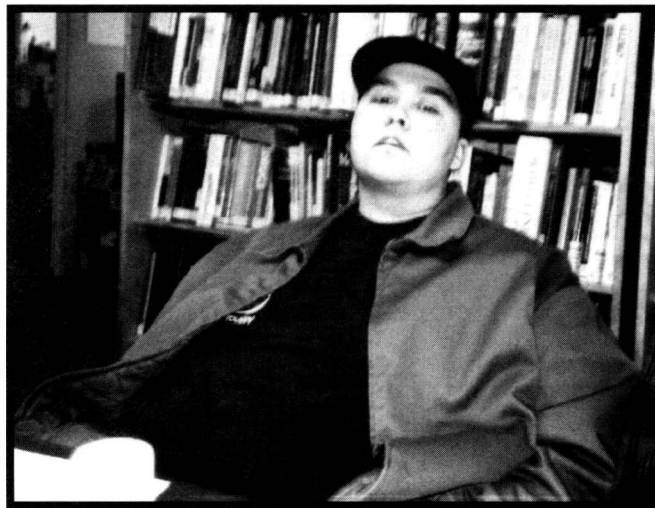
O: Why do you think you don't have a lot of butch friends?

J: I think it's because I relate to femmes better than I relate to butches. Sometimes, also - to segue into another question on the list - sometimes butches' behavior bothers me. Sometimes it seems, if a situation is really tense and people don't know each other very well, one way that they choose to bond

with each other is to put down or make fun of femmes, and that really pisses me off. So I just avoid those situations. Or if they start putting femmes down, I just won't play along. That's one of the biggest things about butch behavior that really puts me off.

A: Yeah, I really agree with that. Of the people I know, there are only a couple I can think of who treat femmes like that, and I really hate it. I really don't want to be around them. I try to confront them when it happens, but they're really not into changing how they are.

O: No, they're not.



**Oso:**  
**I even like the dirty laundry...femmes have things that I just wouldn't have. You know what I mean? Mixing with my boxers... And I like to see their stuff in my room. There's just something about a femme in my house that seriously pleases me.**

J: Even if people don't exhibit those kinds of behaviors normally, if you get them in tense social situations, they will kind of grasp at that, 'cause it's an easy thing to do.

O: Do you sexually prefer butches, femmes, both, neither? What about for friends?

J: I looked around in my life and realized that I missed having butch friends and butch energy in my life, and made that happen. I'd gotten on some other path where it just wasn't happening, and wasn't really aware of it. And actually, around the time that Margo and I met, I really put energy into changing that, so that some of the people that I'm closest to, now, are butch dykes. Then I got into a relationship with one. I think that changes a lot of things. I went looking for that. I came out with a butch, and then kind of learned to toe the line, at some point, and got into relationships with femmes, and did that for a decade. And I ran into somebody I'd been lovers with, early in my life, and decided that I really missed having that sameness in our relationship, and specifically looked for a relationship with another butch, and incorporated that into a lot of my friendships . . . into creating new friendships. It changed a lot in my life. Actually, the funniest thing about that is the instant insecurity of my femme ex-girlfriends and my femme best friend. They suddenly felt really erased by me making a different choice in the present. I had to reassure people that I didn't regret spending the time I spent being lovers with femmes. I wasn't saying I didn't want that anymore. I was just wanting something else, too. I don't feel like I got flak from butches at all, but I got tons of flak from femmes that I was close to. They just got real insecure.

M: I felt that way, too, when I was with butches - that femmes were upset by it, I think partially because it was two more butches who were not available. Just people, in general, I mean men were afraid. Straight men were horrified! Except, actually, when Judith and I were at the flea market once. This one straight man hit on both of us together!

J: He wanted to fuck us!

M: Yeah, he wanted to take us home together! I don't know what he was thinking. But in general, when I was with this other butch, we just had straight men look at us with not just horror, but fear. It was really cool! But I'm happy to be with butches and femmes. I go both ways.

J: Kathy and I were called fags when we were in her truck, and I don't even know how these kids really got a good look at us. Maybe they saw the rainbow sticker on the back of the truck, and maybe they're clued in. But they pulled up to us and called us fag. It's like, "Okay, get your terminology right, boys!"

O: Yeah, I definitely prefer femmes. I hadn't ever really been with a butch, so I don't really have a lot of information about that, but I've always been totally attracted to girly girls. I think I

**They seem annoyed at me for identifying as stone, and always question it... "Oh, you really do want to get fucked, you just don't want to tell us about it."**

femmes.

A: Yeah, I prefer femmes, too. I have had relationships with one butch, maybe two, and a couple of androgynous people, but they just weren't as sexually exciting to me as femmes are. And I think that, when I was being sexual with them, I was focusing on their femminess, however much of it there was.

J: I was so excited, when I got into this relationship, to relive having a sameness that I missed . . . that I grew up and came out with, and that I put away. It was very fun and very exciting and very sexual, for me, to kind of reinvent that feeling of sameness and camaraderie, I guess.

O: Yeah, I think it's just the opposite, for me, because what I love about the butch/femme dynamic is the extreme opposite. I really go for high femme, and I really like the complete difference. I even like the symbolic stuff, like the dirty laundry . . . femmes have things that I just wouldn't have. You know what I mean? Mixing with my boxers, or whatever . . . I really like that! And I like to see their stuff in my room. There's just something about a femme in my house that seriously pleases me in a big way. And I think it is the exact opposite that I crave, the difference.

M: I guess I like all those things. I'm with a femme who is very strong, and who will sometimes put on a shirt and a tie, and will look like a butch, and has been approached as being a butch, but is still a femme who likes wearing very feminine clothes sometimes, not a high femme, but a very, very strong femme.

O: I actually have, sort of recently, thought about the whole butch-on-butth thing, in terms of "fag play." For me, I would consider it play, because I wouldn't think of it as a main, primary relationship. But I have been reluctant to do it, because I haven't really known . . . it seems like such a different world. Like, I have butches hit on me, and I usually just either have no idea or I don't really know what to do. I feel like I know all the rules

**I like to get fucked.**

**Keep reading! More on page 40.**



for butch/femme stuff - there's sort of this way that you can interact that I don't know with butches - or even femmes with femmes, for that matter. I would assume that there has to be a little bit of a difference in how you'd go about that sort of thing. I recently connected with someone who's definitely femme, and definitely identifies as high femme, but also likes to play as a boy sometimes. So I've been able to talk about exploring doing butch-on-butch stuff without really have . . . I feel like I know how to relate to her, because she is really a femme, the way Margo said her girlfriend is really a femme, but sometimes wears a shirt and tie, or whatever. It's a way for me to be able to look at that and still know how to relate, and still for myself, feel safe. I'm not stepping out of what I know, but it's also sort of this new thing for me to be.

J: That's great!

A: That sounds good!

O: Should we go to the next question?

J: Which is what?

O: If you were a stone butch or a butch bottom, how does this impact your sexuality?

M: Judith?

J: I don't know that I strongly identify with either. I'm certainly not a stone butch, and I don't know . . . well, if the truth be told, yeah, I'm actually a butch bottom. Ok, I am.

M: That's what I heard.

J: How does this impact my sexuality?

O: I'm kind of confused . . .

J: Isn't that my sexuality?

O: I don't understand the question exactly. Does anyone?

M: I didn't make it up. It's a femme question.

O: Does anyone understand it? Speak to me!

J: You were talking about feeling some sort of rift between butches in general and being identified as a stone butch, and I certainly felt, in the past - although maybe I just don't care anymore - some sort of rift between butches in general, and myself as a butch bottom. When I started bottoming, when I was hanging out in the S/M community, I guess I had issues with that, being separated. But I'm not hanging out in that community anymore, and I'm really comfortable with what comes. So I guess I don't really feel like I care if it's okay with other butches, or not. I like to get fucked. I'm not asking for anything of them, so if they have a problem with it, they can probably take it home and complain to somebody else.

O: In terms of being a stone butch and it impacting my sexuality, I think it just is my sexuality . . .

M: Maybe the question should be more, "How does it impact your identity as a butch?" I think some of you have already talked about it.

O: I think the way it's impacted my life - to be stone - is that I definitely get . . . there have been a lot of times where I didn't feel comfortable with it. It's the one part of being butch that I feel like I have had, not internal issues about, but I felt it was a struggle. That people would really question me about it, and push

me on it, and not believe me, and always want to test where they could go with it, it would be a constant struggle. I definitely have felt that I'm an old-school stone butch trapped in a 25-year-old urban San Francisco dyke body, that actually I was born at the wrong time. There was a time when it was really the thing to be stone, the acceptable thing -

or even beyond the acceptable thing, extremely norm - but that was awhile ago, and now I'm really far removed from the norm. Also, not everyone wants to go out with stone butches. Lots of femmes that I really like a lot, unless we're going to be in an open relationship, they wouldn't want

to be with me forever and never be able to fuck somebody, anybody. So I think that's this thing - that it's hard to find one-sided femmes, at least nowadays. It's more common to find femmes

who sort of want it to go both ways, or who primarily identify as tops. It's not like "butches are tops, and femmes are bottoms," so whenever I think of writing a personal ad or whatever, I put it out there right away. It's this big thing that I feel I have to say, and get it out there, so that if they have any issue whatsoever, they'll just go away without putting it on me. So I don't have to deal with it. I just say it, and they can either bail or not. That's the way it is. So I guess that's the way it's impacted my sexuality. 'Cause I think it's harder to get dates, especially when you're talking serious dates. I think mostly anyone would be into a one-night thing, or a few nights, but if you're talking long-term, then I think they start getting worried - like, "For the rest of my life, I'll never be inside another girl."

M: Having been on the other side of it . . . I was with someone who was stone butch, and that lasted about a week - her being stone butch, 'cause I just couldn't deal. But she wanted to be with me, so she rolled over. But she was used to being with femmes . . . actually she was used to being with straight women, who that really worked out well with, but there was no way I would . . . I didn't want to do it at all. I mean, I wouldn't do it. But that was intense.

O: It's a totally intense thing. I feel for me, how you said she rolled over . . . for me, being stone butch is like being butch for me. I couldn't just decide tomorrow to not be that way. I couldn't just wake up in the morning and say, "Well, you know what, I don't know. Why bother? Go ahead. I'm all yours." I just don't think I could. It's been really hard for me. One of the reasons I ended a really big relationship in my life was that their sexuality

## **What do you think are the differences between butches and femmes?**

## **Underwear.**

really changed, and they wanted to be the people doing the fucking, and that just wasn't going to work for me in my life at all. So shall we go on to the next one?

M: Yes.

O: How do the misogynist attitudes in general society affect the way you see and treat femmes?

J: Well, I think A and you both mentioned a little bit that that happens. I really try not to do that. But I think it's impossible not to do it, just like it's impossible never to have a racist thought in a society that's built on racism.

O: What bothers you about butches?

A: I think the biggest thing that bothers me is what we were just talking about.

O: That they talk badly about femmes?

A: Yeah.

M: I think sometimes some of the people I know and have met feel like they have to behave a certain way - feel like because they're butch, they have to not show emotions or relate in a certain way. And that's hard, because I don't really want to be limited by that stereotype.

O: I think that butches have taken some really gross heterosexual male characteristics and tried to attribute them to being butch, and I think that's kind of problem-



**Butchie & Judith:**

**Because I'm in a relationship with another butch, because I'm choosing to make a perverse choice, in the general culture, because I'm more of a bottom, I just don't feel very akin to a broader butch community. I don't assume that I'm going to be any more accepted by a group of butches than any other group of people.**

atic. Like the idea that you have to talk shit to femmes, or that you'd have to be this macho jerk, or never smile - that's kind of a weird thing. When I think about being butch, especially in a historical sense, I think there was probably some misogynistic stuff going on, but there was also a lot of respect. When I think of old-school butch/femme, there was a lot of respect for femmes, and I don't see that happening as much anymore. I think the respect for femmes has gone away, and it's a sad thing.

J: I don't feel part of a very integrated community, in terms of butches. I feel . . . I think because I'm in a relationship with another butch, because I'm choosing to make a perverse choice, in the general culture, because I'm more of a bottom, I just don't

feel very akin to a broader butch community. I don't assume that I'm going to be any more accepted by a group of butches than any other group of women, people, whatever. It's just kind of sad.

A: Do you think that has anything to do with being a bottom, identifying as a bottom? Or is it something else?

J: I don't know. I feel like I got to a point of being comfortable enough with myself that I no longer felt like I had to live up to any outside standard, and I don't anymore. I mean, I'm not cool; I don't fit into any of what's cool. I just feel less associated with them. I don't know. I don't feel like I'm being very clear, but I'm not sure how to articulate it.

O: Do you want to go on to another question? Which one?

M: Okay, we have three more questions. I think the last one's a good one.

O: What do you think are the differences between butches and femmes?

J: Wow! Something I'm not prepared for! I don't know I ever was prepared for . . . Some of us think about this a lot.

A: Underwear.

M: I think it's underwear.

J: No. I think it's a different way of dealing with the world. It's kind of two different languages, I think. I think that femmes inter-

act with the world very differently than butches do.

O: Work the world! I've gotten a lot of free shit from femmes working the world for me.

J: It's like if you get into a cab . . . you know what I'm talking about? . . . and the driver asks you where you want to go . . . and I've done this! I'm the only butch in a cab full of femmes. The driver asks one of the femmes where they want to go, and ten sentences later, I have to finally cut in and say we're going to "X," because he's just not understanding what she's trying to say. So I think that femmes communicate differently than I do, and look at the world differently. I'm not sure how they look at

the world.

A: They're from Venus, you're from Mars.

J: I don't think that's it.

O: I have to say I think it's underwear. That's my big thing. With the femmes that I'm with, I haven't really fit a lot of the stereotypes. Like I don't work on the car. You know, I take my car to a mechanic. So I don't know. There a lot of things about the whole butch/femme thing that I think get blurred. But for me, the one thing that's never been blurred, no matter who the femme was, was the underwear. Some femmes work on cars; some femmes don't cook; some butches do cook; some femmes are the ones who go out to work; some butches stay home. But the underwear is really . . .

J: But, see, a high femme in boxer shorts is still a high femme.

O: Oh, she's still a high femme, but would she wear boxers under her Catholic School Girl . . .

J: Yes.

O: But mostly, probably not. They're probably going to wear those kind of underwear.

J: Yeah. But do you hear what I'm saying? A femme is still a femme, even if she's wearing boxer shorts.

O: I really don't know any femmes who wear boy underwear.

A: Okay, let's stop talking about underwear.

J: Butchie doesn't wear underwear, at all.

M: Okay, let's stop talking about underwear. What do you think it is that makes a femme a femme?

O: Well, this has been this tough question. I feel like there's a whole problem that femmes are really invisible without butches, and I would like to see that not be true. But I don't really know. . . The way I know who a femme is in the world, like when I see one walking down the street or in a store, I know because of the way she relates to me. So I think that I don't know what is a femme - just a femme on her own in the world, not in relation to me, because obviously I don't know how to look at anything like . . . you know what I mean? How would I be able to look at a framework of what femme is.

M: You mean in terms of differentiating a femme from a straight woman? Because femmes obviously have their whole way of relating to the world. Are you saying that you don't . . .

O: I was talking about femmes, not in relation to straight women.

M: Okay, but you're saying if they're not relating to you, you don't understand how they relate in the world?

O: No, no, no. I'm not saying that at all. No, I absolutely am not saying that! I was thinking about when is a femme a femme.

## I look like a straight man.

M: Right. I hear your question.

O: And I'm saying I don't really know what makes a femme a femme. I feel like I barely can articulate what makes a butch a butch, because that's who I am.

M: Okay. So the answer is you don't know.

O: I don't know what makes a femme a femme, at all. But the question is not what makes a femme a femme. The question is: what do you think are the differences between butches and femmes? And once again, I'll say underwear. I think it's a real answer! What do you think it is?

M: Well, I don't see the chasm of difference that other people do, or other people relate to, because I think there are different continuums of butch and femme, and I think there are probably even some places where they overlap.

O: Also body language. I have to say that no matter what the femmes I know are wearing - they could be wearing my clothes, my underwear, my cologne - they don't walk like butches; they don't stand like butches; they don't hold their hands like butches.

M: Well, where I get stuck is, in many ways, femmes are more like straight women, and in many ways, butches are more like straight men. But there's a whole difference of being queer.

O: I look like a straight man.

M: Right, but I don't feel like a straight man, and I don't feel like femmes are like straight women. But in terms of comparing it to that, I don't know . . .

O: It shouldn't be.

M: Right. That's a problem. I don't know what else to compare it to, because that's the awful paradigm that we've been fed.

## But I don't feel like a straight man.

O: I think I don't like the idea of butch/femme being compared to the heterosexual man/woman thing. It actually doesn't work at all very well, because there's lots of things that are so different about the way butches and femmes relate to each other than the way men and women relate to each other, in the world. I mean, even historically, like historically femmes took care of butches financially, a lot, which is completely opposite from historically - men were the providers and women were their property. So I find there isn't a good way to look at them as a comparison, because they're so different. And men are the ones sort of being pleased, and historically, butches gave the pleasure, in terms of sex, or whatever. You know what I mean.

O: There was this thing that you brought up earlier, which is the general butch/femme assumption within the community, as opposed to a butch/butch or femme/femme, or whatever.

M: Well, I felt like that was basically true, too. And I was kind of surprised to hear you say, Oso, that there was a lot of butch-on-butch in San Francisco. I know I've seen some ads in

the paper . . .

O: Ads? Oh! Personal ads. I thought, "My God! They're getting billboards now!"

M: There have been butch-on-butch or butch-to-butch ads, but I've seen more femme/femme ads. And I know a lot of times, people who will remain nameless have said, "When two femmes are together, rent a butch." So I've heard all these deprecating remarks about both butch-on-butch and femme-on-femme, and the assumption that the only right way to be is butch/femme, or if you can't come up to that, androgynous/androgynous.

J: I don't think it's at all, in terms of relationship, at this point. I think it's cool to go out and party, and shit, but I don't think in terms of relationship, it's really cool or accepted or supported at all. I don't have experience of that.

O: I don't think that there is a butch/femme assumption at all. There is no community for butch/femme couples that exists in San Francisco, really. I would say that my experience is definitely that there is more . . . I wouldn't say that there is more butch-on-butch or femme-on-femme, but more just no labels, anything goes, maybe we're butch tonight, maybe we're femme tomorrow, maybe we're tops, maybe we're bottoms, we switch, we do whatever - that's really the more super "in" thing. The more versatile you can be, the better. But I definitely have experienced a lot of butch-on-butch stuff happening. And true, I think the femme-on-femme thing is definitely moving into San Francisco, but I would say that I haven't really run into the idea that there is a butch/femme assumption, at all.

J: I work in this very straight place, and I'm planning a wedding. Kathy stopped by and visited me at work, and these straight people were really taken aback. It was their assumption that because I'm butch, my lover would be femme, until they saw her. And then it was like the dropping of jaws. Oh, well.

M: I think that the butch/femme assumption does exist. I think it might exist more in the straight community about the queer community, because one of the dumb-ass remarks that always gets spoken, in instances where straight people might not have had that much contact with queer people, is that they'll look at a couple and say, "So, who's the man?"

O: But what has been put out there, in terms of lesbian stuff especially, is really feminine with feminine, in terms of Newsweek and Donahue and all that - and movies. And they're totally not doing butch-on-femme. They're really actually trying to present the norm - the norm, like "normal" looking women with "normal" looking women, leading "normal" looking lives, hanging out on Donahue, talking about their . . .

M: Who are still attractive enough to have normal looking men.

J: But that's not the queer thing - that version, that whole liberal lesbian thing.

A: But that's the media version.

O: I think it's a media thing, but I don't see that anymore . . .

I don't know. I'm not running around to heterosexual households, surveying them on what they think is going on in lesbian couples. But I'd definitely have to say where they get their information is not from mainstream media. I mean, what is most of mainstream media doing.

M: Well, they see our relationships as a reflection of their own paradigm. That's the only way they can see it. I think that's just the way they relate to the world, so they assume everybody else does.

O: I guess I would agree with that, but not in terms of what I would assume to be butch/femme, at all.

M: I'm not saying it is truly butch . . . I'm not saying it's butch/femme, at all. I think it's not. But I'm saying that, for them, they can only see man/woman, masculine/feminine; this is the way we relate; this is the way relationships go, out in the world; therefore, you must have one, too.

O: That's interesting, because I think that I've seen it more turn into: "Oh, isn't it interesting. I could see two women wanting to be together. I have such great friendships with my girlfriends. That's really nice. And that's what you're doing with your life." You know what I mean? They sort of get this whole woman-on-woman sort of thing - like they have envisioned these lesbians sitting around talking about tampons and doing their nails. Do you know what I mean?

M: So how does that relate to butch/femme?

O: I don't think it does. In terms of heterosexual, mainstream culture, I don't know that I think there is an assumption that butch/femme even is heterosexual culture. And definitely I don't think there's a butch/femme assumption in the queer community in San Francisco.

M: Yeah, I would agree with you there, but I don't think there's as big a butch/femme assumption in the lesbian community, and maybe not at all in San Francisco, anymore. But I think you really have to separate the media images that everybody sees from true heterosexual people stuck in the middle of Iowa, who will look at you and say, "Who's the man?"

O: Oh, Iowa! I didn't know we were talking about Iowa!

M: What I want to hear about from other people is the connection between butch identification and class background. And I know, Oso, you had some ideas about that.

O: Yeah, actually I just had a big conversation with someone about this. I think that there's sort of this thing . . . I grew up definitely working class, and I grew up around men who were butch. They were butch, straight guys, and they worked on cars, and they wore their pants hanging low and their stomachs hanging over, and all these things are things I attribute to being butch. And when I met people who were from upper class backgrounds, and I met the men in their families, I was always the butchest person, because they were these upper class men who wore pink shirts, or they're professors. They read books. You know what I mean? They talked very nicely. They did bird-watching stuff - nothing that my uncles or my grandfather would do. They would

never . . . these men would not be wearing Old Spice. These men would not be wearing work shirts. And I think that, for me, that was how I grew up with that idea of butch. What they did, that wasn't working - teaching, or whatever. Unless you're being paid crap, basically, you aren't doing a real job. And I think butch being connected to working class, for me, is really tight in a way that it's not, for butches who come from . . . not that you couldn't be butch from upper class or middle class, but I think it's a really different thing. You're a different kind of butch than a working class butch. And I definitely think the dynamic that has reoccurred, for me, time and time again, is upper class femmes, I think, have a real thing for working class butches, and that tons of relationships that I've seen are like that - the butch is working class, and the femme is middle class or upper-middle class. I've actually heard these femmes comment on that it's true that what they think of as real butch is working class. They have an assumption in their heads of a class background that's lower than theirs, that really is what seems butch to them - not like someone butch that's on their same class level.

J: I think that's true, too. I just wonder why that is.

M: Yeah, I really notice that most of the women who I know who walk in the street every day as butches are primarily from a working class background. And I also learned how to be butch in my family and my neighborhood. My mother was fairly butch, and she would often wear men's clothing, and didn't do the shave-the-leg thing, and was very, very strong. And my father wore khakis or jeans. He was a cabinet-maker. He'd slick his hair back and wear work boots, and most of the men in the neighborhood did the same thing. That's how I feel like I learned how to be butch, too. I can't change oil very well, but those kinds of things - being good with your hands, and having short hair, and wearing work clothes, that kind of stuff - is how I learned how to be butch.

O: Yeah. I think "real butch" is probably a bad term to use. But I definitely think, even outside of the Bay community, that that really goes on between heterosexual men - that upper class men who sit in offices don't necessarily think of themselves as butch, or the same kind of masculine, as the way that men who are working in fields or working in gas stations . . . you know what I mean? The blue collar is a really different kind of being masculine, and that really carried over. Even historically it's totally about class. Those were working class butches who were out there in working class bars, with their lovers being prostitutes. And while all those raids were going on, there were upper class lesbians existing - butches - they were living a totally different life-style, and not being busted in bars, and not dressing in the same way. They were butch, but they were dressing like upper class men, not like street men. And there's a totally different way that you're treated. I look at a working class butch from

the fifties and see butch the same way I'd see my grandfather. He was butch. He was my idea of a butch man.

M: Right. Part of what I want to know is, because we're from working class backgrounds, do we feel more free to be exactly who we are, because of our role models or because we may not be afraid to have jobs that are considered more menial or more physical. I know that some of the jobs that I've had - not currently - but previous jobs I've had have been cooking or baking, where it was really my skill, and my pay was based on my skill, not on what I looked like. So I was more free to do that. And if I hadn't been from a working class background, I might have felt a lot more pressure to get degrees, and to have some kind of fancy white collar job.

J: I think you have to be more able, and maybe more to the point, more willing to assimilate, to work in the white collar world. I mean, I do clerical work, and there's about a billion jobs in the paper that I wouldn't even apply for, because I'm not willing to assimilate to a middle class degree, in terms of what's expected in dress. My position at the hospital is receptionist, and there's twenty-five receptionist jobs in the paper, none of which I would even get looked at in an interview, because I'm not going to look the way they want somebody representing their front, when you walk in the door - an insurance company, or whatever.

O: I think it's about the whole way - not just the clothes - but the whole way that we are. I think that I have body language that totally represents . . . when I was with Elizabeth, I went into totally upper class situations - restaurants, plays, England, whatever - in clothes that were very expensive and meant for men who were upper class, and I still always looked out of place. No matter what I was in - \$500 suit, or not - I never looked like I came from money, and that really made me stand out among these people. Regardless of what I did, I was branded with something that represented coming from a working class background, that I couldn't shake, even if I wanted to. And I think that really pertains to butches in the world, and why we couldn't just stop being this way. I think it's a combination of that we're butch and that we're working class, and our mannerisms, our culture, attitude, the way that we interact with each other and interact with the world isn't going to change, regardless of what we want to do about it. A?

A: I don't know. I don't know what to add, at this point. It seems like something's missing in this whole discussion. I think that it's really easy, because we all grew up working class, to only see things from this perspective, to only view our butchness in this way. And if one of us had been raised middle or upper class, how would that affect our butchness - not just in our clothes or the way we walked - but would we feel differently about our butchness? I don't know.

