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## Gender Show

Music.

DG: From PRI, Public Radio International, it's Outright Radio, I'm David Gilmore. Recently I was in a vegetarian junk-food restaurant in Santa Cruz, you know that surf town in California that is hipper than hip... anyhow, there at the restroom, I was faced with a decision: Door number 1 or Door number 2. These **used** to be the men's room and the women's room. Now I had to pause to consider my options...

DG: Alright I'm looking at the men's room door. I believe it used to be the men's room it has men on the outside of the door here in Saturn Cafe and it says on the door it...has a little note posted here... "We here at the Saturn Café have taken a stance on gender binaries placing people under the category of either man or woman, girl or boy. Our stance is this: We Don't Agree. We have therefore chosen not to gender our bathrooms. We understand that this may make some people uncomfortable, however we also understand that gendered bathrooms and all other gendered things make these people who do not fit into a socially constructed gender binary uncomfortable. Contents of this package: One urinal, one large stall and one sink."

Music under

Reading this sign on the bathroom door, I knew it was time for a show on the meaning of Gender.

Music up.

First up we'll get the overview of gender theory from Dr. Elena Escalera...

*"I think my hope is that people are going to understand that gender is a lot more fluid than we think it is and I hope that the community will be able to talk about gender or sex, gender role expectations, sexual orientations, gender schemas, all these things as separate ideas and realize that it is a very complex issue and there is no black and white answer."*

Later on writer Rob Zonfrelli remembers his childhood and trying to suppress his femininity...

*"This new knowledge that I was an embarrassment and that people were making fun of me because I sounded and acted like a girl, instantly seeped into my brain. It was recorded there, next to all the other bundles of information that reminded me just how horribly defective I was. I began to feel dizzy and nauseous."*

And finally, writer Jenny Worley masquerades as a butch furniture mover for an honest day's work...

*"On the morning of the move, I got up and went into my closet. I dug through my stuff for a t-shirt that wasn't baby-doll cut, a bra that wasn't lacy or padded, socks that weren't over-the-knee school-girl style, shoes without platform heels, and a pair of shorts that wasn't a skirt. I returned to the bedroom in my new drag to consult with my girlfriend Renee. "Does this look butch enough?"*

All true stories, and all on a theme of Butches, Femmes and the Question of Gender. We hope you'll join us for the next hour as we present the extraordinary stories from the heart of gay America.

Music

To start off our show on gender I spoke with lesbian professor Dr. Elena Escalera who teaches psychology and is an expert on socio-linguistics – the role that language plays in social interaction. Elena is a rich source of information on the

subject of gender markers, gender role expectations and the butch/femme dichotomy. She'll explain it all for us shortly. I met up with her at a gathering of queer folks in rural New Mexico. Now, Elena is no small presence in any social setting and at first glance her looks sent my gender compass spinning.

She spoke about her first day at school teaching in what would be considered an unlikely setting for someone like her. I asked her to describe herself and talk about how her appearance sets the stage for discussions on gender theory and other misconceptions students may have...

EE: I weigh like over 350 pounds and I'm bi racial, and I'm bald, and that was an interesting thing when I shaved my head I went from being the fat woman to being the bald woman and that was a really weird thing too.

I have a job at a small catholic college. And I'm a professor at a small catholic college and they love me.

DG – You teach Psychology?

EE – Yeah, I teach Psychology. So you can imagine you're a freshman, it's 8 o'clock in the morning on your first day of school and you walk into the classroom and you see me – laughter – and you are like whoa what on earth is that?

EE I don't mask it so much. I wear my usual uniform, a black shirt and jeans and my bald head and "Hi here I am" "We're going to talk about psychology.

And I think at first that first day, they don't really you know, know what to think and I think some of them think oh my god, she must have cancer or things like that and over time they just learn that I'm a great big freak and they don't care. Because over time they get to know me as a person.

Music

DG VO: Now, Elena has a partner. She's also roughly about the same size as Elena. It was interesting seeing their car before I met them – they have a bumper sticker that reads: Jenny Craig is a tool for the Man. I wondered a bit about the meaning of that sticker and knew I was in for an interesting interview. Anyhow, Max, who USED to identify as butch is even MORE masculine looking than Elena which creates some interesting situations for the couple...

EE :10 – Max is my partner and she started used to identify as a butch lesbian. It's interesting because, why she identified as a butch lesbian was to get dates. And I think that was sorta interesting and she is kinda of if you look at her, she has a lot of masculine gender markers or things that people will say – you look at someone --and she gets mistaken for a man all the time. On the way here she was going into a bathroom at a rest stop and someone tried to stop her and said Sir – Sir You have to use the other side. And she just turned around and looked at him. And the other guy standing next to him said "don't make her come over here." (laughter by both DG and EE)

EE For instance, she has very close cut hair and so she won't have, she doesn't have the feminine gender marker of hair. She wears men's glasses, so that again is a male marker. She wears men's clothing. That again is, you know, a masculine gender marker.

DG So when you're out together people think you're a couple of guys.

EE Commonly, ...

DG: A gay male couple.

EE: Commonly, people do. they tend to notice that I'm a woman more than they notice she's a woman. Which is sort of interesting.

But she didn't identify as butch and a lot of that has to go into what is butch then. And, I would argue that – and a lot of people -- – this will set off a huge argument. A lot of people identify with butch as a gender. And in that case, I would say well you know, a butch would be a masculine woman and that's going to be --- that's going to take into account two separate ideas – masculine, which is gender and woman which is :33 DG --- sex EE: Either gender identity or sex. So

that starts already to muddy it up. Now how I would place butch if I were doing it according to the way we talk about gender in Psychology, is I would say that Butch is a gender role. And that is there are...

...certain kinds of expectations around Butchness, which get one defined as Butch. The more of these gender role markers that one has, the butcher they would seem.

DG (re-do): What are those expectations of being a butch dyke.

09 EE Well it's kinda intense because I think there's a lot of pressure put on butch dykes. They are definitely commodified and like Max really played the whole butch thing because – you get perks from it.

:19 DG– like dates.

EE: Like dates. Yeh. Definitely that was good for her. But some of those expectations became oppressive and I think they are oppressive for butch dykes the same way those gender role expectations are oppressive and harmful to men.

:37 DG – sure. EE In a lot of the same ways. DG – straight men

EE – straight men. So a lot of men, some of those things are taken from that. In a way, it's kinda like we really don't know the male experience growing up so we kinda adopt these interesting ideas we have, the gender roles around the male gender role and a lot of them are really kinda messed up. Now, remember that these are not necessarily descriptions of butch behavior, and this is the really important thing I want to say.

EE: This does not describe what one needs to be a butch Dyke. This is a gender role expectation.

EE So, in fact I've known very few butches who fit all of these gender role expectations.

DG : and the gender expectation is that you be tough, unemotional, ...

:18 EE OK, you be tough, unemotional ... a lot of places the butches are expected to be the top. :25 DG – Hm Hm sexual aggressor . . .EE: The sexual aggressor, Butches are expected to be stone, they are not supposed to receive, in fact in some places they don't take off their clothes even.  
(some talking over by David during this)

:19 EE = So they don't want to be the one who is – they don't want to be touched, they don't want to be at the receiving end of , you know, sort of sexual, ....

:52 DG Well, that's picking up the worst parts of masculinity.

EE Yeh, exactly, exactly.

DG – It's like Stanley Kowalski, you know

:58 EE Yes, and they are supposed to be ... uh .. in a lot of ways, and this is what Max has always said, you know that she, you know, after identifying as being butch and having people tell her, oh, she isn't butch enough, she came home one day and said I think people don't think I'm butch cuz, I'm not obnoxious, I don't push people around, like you were saying all those negative aspects of masculinity.

But those things don't have anything to do with a woman being a butch.

Butch I think is around gender identity. Butch I think is around that identification of be being a masculine woman. The things that make butchness really have nothing to do with any of those gender role expectations.

Music

DG: OK, so are you following what she's saying? Male/Female is your sex. It's defined in your chromosomes. It's your being. Gender is your doing. It's how you choose to identify yourself: feminine or masculine or lots of shades in between. And you choose your gender markers: for example a boy MIGHT choose a gender marker of wearing pants, a girl MIGHT choose a gender marker of wearing a dress. And gender role expectations would be that a man acts masculine by being surly and abrupt, a woman acts feminine by being soft and agreeable. OK, so I asked Elena if she could craft a vision of what the ideal butch could be...

EE: You are talking to someone who doesn't identify as a fem. Commonly butch is thought of in – sort of these butch/fem dichotomy. So a fem will look for something different than me who is androgynous.... :30 So when we talk about the ideal butch. I think a lot of times people embrace the gender roles. The other thing is that, not only is it that I am not part of the butch fem dichotomy, but also, that - I don't necessarily see those gender role expectations as being a good thing. Gender is so individual. So when you're looking at this: what is your sex, what is your gender identity, what are the gender roles that you're adopting? All these different ideas there are. What context is it all happening? So individual depending on the context.

Music

DG – Tell me a little bit about your housemate that was a butch/lesbian, correct? and then went thru transition to become a man.

EE: It's interesting cuz over the years I've had a lot of friends who are trans gendered or trans sexual and I think there is a really big different between those two and this is something that when we bring this up in gender theories, this is a situation where a person feels not only that they are, I think they feel comfortable with their gender, but they feel a very powerful drive to make their gender and their sex match. So what happens is they would pursue trying to become a different sex. And I did have a roommate because I lived in an all dyke household, who became a man. I think that in some ways it was obvious that he was in a lot of pain. And I remember at one point him talking to me and saying "You know not everybody can live like this. I can't live like this anymore, I can't .... "

DG – Like this, meaning?

EE: What he called "I can't be a he, she, it thing" And just the saying, even now saying that word, you know 'he, she, it thing' is like I could feel all the pain that he was feeling, but one of the fascinating things, about what happened in that transition was that he was consistently saying "I want to be a good guy," I want to be a guy who is sensitive to those issues".

But you know, even as a woman he wasn't as sensitive. So you know when it comes to a point where someone in the household is bleeding and having cramps and having cramps and he's then going "ha ha ha I don't have to do that anymore." There is that sense that first of all you're an idiot for laughing at a woman who is currently in pain on her period because – that's dangerous -- ,

... but also you're doing it as a man, but if you were a bio man, if you were a man who was born a man, I can understand you haven't had that experience, you don't understand what it's about, but here is a man who was a woman, who used to bleed, who used to have cramps, and laughing at another woman who or it feels like a betrayal or an abandonment and to some extent laughing at someone who has menstrual cramps is misogyny.

EE 1:59 Now I'm not saying that all transsexuals are misogynists, but I'm saying that in that particular situation, that's misogyny. And I think it's a really powerful thing that is happening right now is, if you have a choice. You know before, we always had gender has been fluid, but sex has not. And now to much to more to a degree sex is more fluid. We're being able to change our mind. With that comes, the issue of well, who wouldn't want to be a man. Who wouldn't want to, have the goodies that go along with that. And, he actually is transitioned now, he's post-op and is living as a straight man.

Music

It's interesting cuz ....

EE .... we used to have take out food, that every time we called they'd get our order wrong, the wouldn't do anything about it. They were meant to this one place that every time we called they'd get our order wrong, were just really mean to us all the time and we stopped ordering food from them.

:12 But he could call, and if they got his order wrong, he would yell at them on the phone and they would bring him a new order. And we asked him, please don't order from that place, please don't spend your money there, please don't contribute to their sexism, please.

:25 And it was this issue of, you know, something would happen in the house like that, like we couldn't get anyone from the electric company to come out. And he would call once and someone would come out. And he'd say "See isn't it handy to have a man around the house?" And let me tell you,

(laughter)

:39 EE ... Five very angry dykes going ahem... This is a dyke household, you are on thin ice dude, you need to shut up. And ...

:54 DG – Did you all throw him out eventually?

:55 EE – No, No, we didn't throw him out and that was actually a really big bone of contention at the time, because he moved in and he knew that he was going to transition and he didn't tell us, so there was that sense of betrayal there.

Music

DG: I asked Elena about the ongoing debate about inclusion of transgendered women into women's-only spaces like the dyke marches and the Michigan Womyn's Festival...

:43 EE First of all you have this whole generation of woman who have struggled to establish woman only space and woman only space is crucial.

I study language and in most situations when you are in a group it is run in a very male dominated way and if there is a man in the group he will talk more he will interrupt more, it's really hard for women to get their voices in a mixed group.

And women-only space is shockingly amazing – the effects of the women who exist in it, because they develop a voice that doesn't develop in women who don't experience that.

1:02 EE: Actually there is a festival in San Francisco, called lady fest and they have an interesting policy which is "You're welcome to come if you have been are currently or will be a woman." So that was an interesting policy and it dealt with the issues, but there is the issue of you know, what about these people who are transgendered and we are saying no you can't come to dyke events anymore, you can't be part of this community who have actually helped build the community and we say no, now you have to build another community...your own community – a trans community because you are no longer female?

Music

DG: I asked Elena about her observations in pop culture which, at least in America, is a reliable prognosticator, if not, the genesis of social change...

:03 EE – It's kind of interesting...what do I see happening? There's things like Marilyn Manson – I love Marilyn Manson. Everybody's so up in arms like the state of Missouri just got this huge amount of money to fight the war on Goth. They have these cute boys running around with long hair, makeup and velvet dressed. I think that's wonderful and straight boys running around with long hair.

:28 I think that it's a wonderful thing, but I think that's why there's a war on Goth.

I don't think it a war on Goth. I think it's a war on Gender violation. Of gender role expectation violation.

EE – I remember the day that that Vanity Fair came out with KD Lang on the cover and Cindy Crawford. And KD Lang is sitting in the barber chair and Cindy Crawford is just this little teddy shaving her with a straight razor.

:17 This is basically a general consumption straight population magazine and those kinds of images are subversive. And I think there is a way we look at that and go “Wow,” “that’s really cool” and I think there’s a way in which that scares us because we like to be comfortable and I don’t think we’re going to be comfortable around gender.

1:10 DG – We like to be comfortable and comfort comes, at least in this country it seems, in the form of nice neat little packages for everything.

00 EE Oh yeah, we’re very security based and we like to think, “Oh we’re Americans. We’re the melting pot of the world, we’re yea diversity, la la la –but you know all you have to do is look around. Ever since the terrorist attacks on our country people have been throwing away our civil liberties left and right they don’t really care, nobody’s trying to stop anything. It’s something that people have to stop and realize is that uncertainty is a fact of the world, but we just can’t deal with it. The human being doesn’t like uncertainty, we have to organize certain information. It’s part of our nature. In fact it’s the part of our nature that makes up prejudice, it is, everybody is, we can’t help it.

Music

:05 DG: Where do you think ultimately all of this discussion is going to get us? I mean, 10 years down the road we’re probably going to give up talking about it so much b/c we’ll have worn it out. Where do you think/how do you think society is going to benefit from all this?

EE – Well, I would like to think that society would benefit from it in terms of increasing the freedom people have to express themselves and to be who they are.

And I think it puts a whole other spin on sexism and sexual discrimination when you have – when gender is so up in the air. People get really confused, you know, is it, you know, worse to be a butch dyke or a woman who’s become a man, at least

They are trying to fit in where do you draw the line there?

And it’s hard, because I think society is having a lot of trouble understanding where to levy it’s sanctions. And there are stories about, you know, the whole thing about if you violate a gender role expectation, people get aggressive. People get aggressive, people get in fights, people, you know, have a really difficult time. So for instance, if you go to your sister’s wedding in a dress, you’re likely to get a lot of aggression leveled at you. So I think what’s going to happen is that people are going to get really confused, at to where to put the aggression. And do I think it’ll be worse, do I think it’ll be better? It’s really hard to tell. I think my hope is that people are going to understand that gender is a lot more fluid than we think it is and I hope that the community will be able to talk about gender or sex, gender role expectations, sexual orientations, gender schemas, all these things as separate ideas and realize that it is a very complex issue and there is no black and white answer.

Music.

Dr. Elena Escalera, professor of psychology at St. Mary's College in Oakland, CA, who has recently completed a study on gender and language. You’ll find a glossary of all the terms in this interview on our website at [OurRightRadio.org](http://OurRightRadio.org).

Music

Coming up: Rob Zonfrelli tries to suppress his childhood lisp and Jenny Worley morphs into super-butcht for a day. We’ll be back with more gender stories when Outright Radio continues...from PRI Public Radio International.

Break

You’re listening to Outright Radio, pause from PRI, Public Radio International, I’m David Gilmore. You can contact us at [Comments@OutrightRadio.org](mailto:Comments@OutrightRadio.org) or call us toll-free at 866-OUTRADIO. That’s 866-688-7234. (Do this every time)

Now back to our theme of Butches, Femmes and the Question of Gender...

There is a website called StraightActing.com where you can take a little quiz and rate yourself according to your masculinity and femininity. As you'll soon hear, writer Rob Zonfrelli took that quiz and rated himself...and the answer... was kind of surprising, considering that throughout his adolescence, Rob simply couldn't keep the lid on the sissy. No matter what he did, his true nelly nature came screaming through. Here's his story...

Rob Zonfrelli's story:

I might as well tell you right up front, because you'll find out soon enough anyway.....I lengthen my fricatives. Not only that, but my prosodic characteristics are extremely pronounced as well.....In case you're not a linguist, and really, in today's economy who can afford to be, what I basically told you about myself is that I possess certain vocal qualities that might indicate to others that I'm homossexual. Let me break it down some more. Fricatives are consonants like s and z. When pronounced, they are forced out of our mouths through a very narrow opening, thus creating an audible friction. I just happen to emphasize my friction more than most people. Now,.....prosodic characteristics is a term used to describe pitch and fluctuation patterns of the voice. Mine can be best described as roller coaster like. Putting it all together, it means I'm prone to saying things like, "Oh Sssusssan, thanksss ssoo much for lending me your Zzzagat'sss Guide to Barcelona." I also have to tell you that in addition to my lingual characteristics, I also tend to utilize hand and facial gestures similar to that of a Southern contestant in the Miss America Beauty Pageant.

Music

I'm sure you can imagine what my adolescence was like. It really started becoming heinous in the fifth grade when my classmates became hyper aware that society prefers boys and girls who fit into a tidy gender mold. Those who slipped easily into this mold, rejoiced in their newly found status, then quickly formed an alliance and agreed to persecute relentlessly those who did not fit the mold.

At first I didn't think much of it. I was convinced I fit the mold perfectly. So, you can imagine my shock when in the school cafeteria one day, this gender Gestapo singled me out in the ice cream line and proceeded to hurl the epithet "faggot" at me. I was stunned. I couldn't imagine what it was about me that would have incited them to call me such a name.

Music

Well, thank god I had other things to concentrate on - like preparing for my role as Farrah Fawcett in the "Charlie's Angels" skit for the school's annual talent show. On the night of the show, I performed my little heart out. Part of the skit required me to skateboard across the stage, dressed in my skirt and blond flowing wig, and knock down a Russian spy. Next, I had to hike up my skirt, show a little leg and distract a security guard while Kelly and Sabrina snuck into the Russian Embassy. At one point in the skit, I had to dance around the stage and sing the 1970s jingle from Burger King, "Hold the pickles, hold the lettuce, special orders don't upset us." I can't exactly remember how it fit into the plot or why I even found it remotely amusing - but I kept it in.

Later, that night, back at home, my brother had a mini breakdown just before our bedtime.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I was really embarrassed by you tonight," he said with an odd mixture of anger and sympathy.

"Because I dressed up like a girl?" I asked. "Tom and Mark did it too, and their families just thought it was funny," I added defensively.

"But you really sounded and acted like a girl," he replied. "When you sang the Burger King song, people were making fun of you, you know."

I instantly felt my brain go numb, as if it wanted protect my ego from any further psychic damage. It didn't work. This new knowledge that I was an embarrassment and people were making fun of me because I sounded and acted like a girl, seeped quickly into my brain. It was recorded there, next to all the other bundles of information that reminded me just how defective I was.

## Music

The harassment from the gender Gestapo continued daily with different levels of intensity. For instance, later on in the year, I had to give a book review to my class. I chose "Little House on the Prairie." I didn't choose this book because I had a particular penchant for all things Laura Ingalls Wilder. I chose it because I hated reading and thought if I caught a few episodes of the television program starring Michael Landon, I'd be able to wing it. Anyhow, when I announced to the class what book I had chosen, the Gestapo snickered. I was expecting that but hoped from that point on it would be smooth sailing. It wasn't. Apparently, my voice was a little too lilting and animated especially when I discussed a prank Half Pint played on Nellie Olsen. I could hear the guys in the back of the room repeating certain phrases that I had just said while making their wrists go limp. I remember feeling hopeless and hating myself for not being able to express myself in an acceptable manner.

## Music

The harassment continued well into the later grades. For example, I remember when I was a sophomore, I was invited to Peter Fitzpatrick's pool party. His mother must have forced him into inviting me because she and my mother were friends. I was convinced that this would be the perfect opportunity to let the guys know that I was one of them, that there wasn't anything abnormal about me. When a group of guys started talking about their lust for Cheryl Tiegs and Bo Derek, I knew this was my shot to assert my masculinity. I scanned my brain trying to think of a hot babe. All I could think of was Catherine Bach, who played Daisy on the "Dukes of Hazzard. You know, the one whose shorts kept inching up higher every time the ratings slipped. I guess my act was convincing at first. I made up some story about how I'd like to see her naked in the backseat of the General Lee. Buried safely in the back of my mind, however, I knew that what I really wanted to see was Bo and Luke Duke naked while giving the General Lee a tune-up. Anyhow, I was doing fine until I made the fatal error of stating, "she's gorgeous." Todd Mecham pounced on me immediately and shouted in his most effeminate voice, "she's gorgeousssss." Naturally, he couldn't let it drop at that. He continued, "she's sssuper ssssexy." "She's sssensational. Everyone laughed hysterically and tried to come up with other adjectives beginning with S.

## Music

After that, I decided that in order to stop the constant attacks, I just needed to stop expressing myself. Basically, I had to give up my voice and keep my gestures in check. If no one ever heard me or saw me carry my books on my hip, I wouldn't have to suffer the humiliation of being referred to as a girl. Most importantly, I wouldn't be reminded of the fact that an incredible surge of desire exploded throughout my body every time I saw an upperclassman naked in the shower or a Jim Palmer underwear ad.

## Music

By age 23, I pretty much admitted to myself that I was gay. I still didn't want it to show, however. I wanted to pass for straight. At my first job at a public relations firm, programming my voice-mail greeting turned into a daunting task. I must have re-recorded it at least twenty times so I didn't sound like an excitable, young Judy Garland. Eventually, I settled for a greeting devoid of any human emotion.

I was convinced I was passing, until my supervisor, Miriam, took me aside one day and asked me if I was taking a date to the Christmas party. I told her that I was taking my friend Jane. She looked relieved and informed me that the owner of the firm, Ssterling, suspected I was gay and was not comfortable with it. Even with my "date," the firm decided to drop me anyway.

## Music

A few months later, while on a flight from hell bound for San Jose (yes, they're two separate places), my life was suddenly thrust into a new direction.....I had just been given my lunch tray and was eating away merrily. Just as I began unwrapping my little block of Baby Bell cheese, the plane began to rock. A few seconds later, the rocking increased to the point where people started to get nervous. By my last bite of cheese, the plane was rocking so violently that people's lunch items were flying throughout the cabin. At this point, a hysterical flight attendant got on the intercom and gave us some sort of instructions that no one could understand because she was hyperventilating. We were in trouble and everyone knew it. People started crying, kids were shrieking and others were praying. Oddly, while I was experiencing

fear, I mostly felt an incredible sadness. I realized that I had wasted a good portion of my life feeling ashamed and so needy of people's approval. I realized that I had paid a high price for masking my true self. The thought that at age 24, I had never kissed a man or for that matter bothered to make any inroads into the gay community, felt particularly devastating. I vowed that if our plane managed to stay intact, I would spend the rest of my life figuring out who I was, what I wanted, and what was good about me.

Music

The plane eventually landed safely in San Jose. Of course, there was a small earthquake there later on that evening, but that's a different story. When I got back home to Massachusetts, the first thing I did was dump my closet case therapist who kept telling me that I wasn't really gay and that if I spent an exorbitant amount of time with him each week, he could straighten me out. Next, I got involved with the gay community in Boston. I joined several organizations and met amazing men and women who were proud of who they were and made no attempts to cover up any part of themselves just because it deviated from the norm. In fact, they reveled in their differences. The support I received from these people was so powerful that for the first time I began understanding that I wasn't defective - that the group of people who responded so negatively towards me over the years, did so because they led small lives in a tiny world that never expanded.

Fully entrenched in the gay community, free to express myself without fear of scorn, feeling like I had just as much right as anyone else to be on this planet, you'd think I would have been experiencing queer bliss. This wasn't the case, however. Even though I had become accepting of my effeminate traits, I came to realize that the only men I was attracted to were those whose sexual orientation could not be detected by Gaydar. Basically, I wanted a straight acting boyfriend - I wanted the captain of the football team, the Marine, the cop, the Marlboro Man - after he had gone on the patch.

Music

I had joined a gay soccer league in Boston. The coach of the team was a beefy, blond hunk with the disposition of a drill sergeant. With his tight red football shorts, white crew shirt and a whistle dangling around his neck, he was my masculine he-man personified. I imagined that he never felt insecure, that he was all knowing, and that he could protect me from all harm. I decided in my head that he would be my boyfriend. Unfortunately, he barely noticed me at practice - except for the time when he barked at me for being off sides or something. Undeterred, I vowed that someday I'd have a straight-acting boyfriend of my own.

Recently, I read about a website called StraightActing.com. According to the article, this site was developed to bring together gay men who prefer "straight acting men" via personal ads. Apparently, before you're able to place an ad, you have to take their straight acting test to see where you score on their macho versus nellie continuum. I decided to log on.

Music

INSERT LOGGING ON, TAKING TEST, REACTION.

Needless to say, I was initially quite surprised that I registered so high on their straight acting meter. I think the fact that I indicated on the quiz that I knew how to change a flat tire, that my apartment was usually messy, and that I didn't own any Madonna cd's, must have carried some significant straight acting points. Of course, it later dawned on me that another reason I got this score was because the quiz didn't include a speech or gesture component. Had the quiz required me to read aloud a passage from "The Valley of the Dolls" and supply the appropriate character movements, I'm sure my score would have swung rapidly in the other direction.

Music

Regrettably, I spent most of my twenties trying to find my he-man. Whenever I did encounter one of these guys who seemed to fit the bill, I instantly began looking for signs of effeminacy. As soon as he even came close to mentioning anything about hardwood floors or tile top counters, the fantasy would disintegrate immediately, and I'd have to move on.

When the gay community couldn't provide me with my fantasy guy, I subconsciously turned to the straight world. I began a series of nonsexual relationships with married straight men. Inevitably, the guy liked the fact that I was gay and was lavishing him with attention, he'd flirt with me and say things like, "If I ever go gay, you're the one for me." Next, he would start to fall apart emotionally due to the stress of everyday life and the fact that as a man, he was not able to express his feelings freely. Following that, he would call me frequently any time a crisis arose and he was in need of a therapist..

This was especially true of Josh in New York. He was ruggedly handsome and he knew it. After we met, he immediately began seducing me - not to sleep with him, but to be his companion. Every time we got together, he would have a breakdown and need me to comfort him. Unfortunately, this was never a two way street. Whenever he sensed my attention wavering, he turned on his sexual charms.

During an appointment with my therapist, I mentioned that I found my relationship with Josh frustrating. Probably sick of hearing me describing my unhealthy patterns week after week, his reply was instant and matter of fact, "of course it's frustrating," he said, "you're performing all the duties of a wife without a ring and without the sex."

Music

I guess that was the brick I needed to have fall on my head. It was really such a simple explanation, you'd think I would have been able to make the cognitive leap on my own. "I guess the only way I'm going to be happy," I said to my therapist, "is to find my he-man in the gay community."

"You won't find him there either," my therapist replied. He explained, "Your he-man doesn't exist in either the gay or straight community. He's a fantasy. Through past conditioning, you've invented him in your brain." "All men," he assured me, "have masculine and feminine components to their personality, some just go to greater lengths to hide their feminine sides. When all of this new information crystallized in my brain, I felt a little better about the 150 bucks I was paying him for a 45 minute hour.

Music

Now, in my late 30s, I've been in a wonderful (not to be confused with storybook) six year relationship with my partner Alex. And yes, he is gay. Alex is a take charge type of guy, who hikes, bikes, knows how to steer a kayak, loves cars and is fascinated with airplane machinery. He also loves to experiment with new recipes, create lovely interior spaces, buy jewelry for his mom, and has been known to lengthen a fricative or two. He's someone who lives comfortably with both the yin and yang aspects of his being. I've learned a lot from him.

Also, I no longer feel inferior to society's version (and my former version) of the ideal man. In fact, sometimes I feel sad for the men who seemingly fit this bill. I would imagine it requires them to surrender most of their emotional life, their spontaneity, their creativity, and their silliness. In my opinion, that's far too high a price to pay to maintain an illusion.

DG: Writer Rob Zonfrelli is currently finishing his novel "Block Party Like It's 1979" about growing up gay in the Reagan years. Special thanks to Dr. Caroline Bowen for her article "Beyond Lipping" which can be found on the web at [www.slpsite.com](http://www.slpsite.com)

Finally on Outright Radio, writer Jenny Worley, normally considered a femme lesbian, takes a stab at being butch for a day and discovers that for her, as a self-defined femme, the pretense of butch, though very sought after among lesbians, is afterall, still pretense.

Jenny Worley's story:

My friend KJ advertises her moving business to San Francisco's gay community as a service provided by "friendly, brawny and thorough butch movers." The idea is that a lot of women, given the option, prefer to deal with a couple of tough but friendly lesbians rather than some leering guys with their butt-cracks showing, especially when it comes to having their panty drawers and other personal items moved across town. The company sometimes receives calls from gay men for whom the words "butch movers" conjures up sexy visions of steroid-pumped gym-bodies rippling under the weight of a large collection of original cast recordings of various Broadway musicals. These fellows are usually disappointed when the butches who show up turn out to be lesbians, who laugh amongst themselves - "Men! Serves them right for objectifying their workers like that!"

But after a few jobs, KJ and her butch movers figured out that the motives of their women clients weren't so different from those of the hopeful gay men. A lot of the ladies – particularly femme lesbians -- enjoyed watching a pair of burly butches grunting and sweating in their bedrooms as they hauled boxes, mattresses and couches. Some femmes even invited their friends over to watch the spectacle under the guise of “helping” with the move. The boldest of them had even video taped the movers for her future viewing pleasure, zooming in on the mover's biceps, backsides and sweaty skin.

Music

So when KJ called last week to say that none of the usual butch crew was available for a two-person job and could I fill in, I was hesitant. It wasn't the athletics -- I am a big, strong, strapping girl – but the aesthetics that worried me.

Music

You see, my own gender presentation is unmistakably femme – shoulder length blonde hair that I wear in a flip or high pony-tail, flowery little halter tops or dresses, fishnet hose, dangly earrings, and tons of lip-gloss. But femme goes beyond dress and hair.. It also means that I smile when people talk to me instead of just nodding, laugh in a girly way, not the restrained “huh-huh” of my butch friends. I speak in a higher register than the carefully modulated, deep timbre of butch-speak. I walk, as Peggy Lee puts it, with a sweet and girlish gait, no sturdy lumber or cocky swagger. I am exuberant, chatty, and nurturing in conversation, like girls are taught to be. So, for example, if another girl said, “I don't think I've packed these boxes very well -- so be careful,” I'd try to make her feel better, gushing, “Oh, honey, I'm totally like that too. I always try to get as much as I can in a box and I forget about putting heavy stuff in small boxes and light stuff in the big ones.” In contrast, a butch like KJ would reply with “Ten-four,” then move the poorly-packed boxes.

Pondering all this, I asked KJ, “What about your “butch movers” ad? Do you think the client will be disappointed that I'm . . . well, you know . . . so girly?”

“Well, the ad says butch movers, that's true.”

“I could try to dress butch for it,” I said hopefully.

“Yeah,” she said, “maybe you should.”

Music

On the morning of the move, I got up and went into my closet. I dug through my stuff for a t-shirt that wasn't baby-doll cut, a bra that wasn't lacy or padded, socks that weren't over-the-knee school-girl style, shoes without platform heels, and a pair of shorts that wasn't a skirt. I returned to the bedroom in my new drag to consult with my girlfriend Renee. “Does this look butch enough?”

She looked at me with an expression of mild scorn. “First of all, I can see your bra. Second, how does that even count as a bra?” she scoffed, gesturing at what KJ would later call “the girliest sports-bra on earth.” The butches, you see, all wear a special sports bra called the “frog bra,” which is actually advertised in the catalog with the words: “Almost like not having breasts at all!” I, on the other hand, hate sports bras for their breast-flattening, lace-free un-sexiness, and had picked out mine for its relatively feminine cut and it's accentuation of the very characteristics the butches seek to suppress.

“Well, this is the butchiest bra I own, and yours won't fit me,” I whined apologetically.

Renee sighed, and patiently led me back to the closet, where she began riffling through her own clothes.

“Here,” she said, handing me a large black t-shirt with a red bike-messenger's union logo on the back. “That muscle shirt is so nelly! It shows way too much skin, not to mention your so-called bra.”

I changed shirts obligingly.

“And don't you have any cutoffs?” Renee asked, eying my neatly hemmed Levi's shorts.

I put on a pair of very short, very, very, tight cut-offs, the kind sometimes referred to as Daisy Dukes, and looked up hopefully. Renee just rolled her eyes, so I took them off and put on the apparently less ridiculous shorts with the hem.

Then she held out one of her baseball caps.

“But I've already got a baseball cap on,” I protested. “I know THAT part!”

But she just shook her head and replaced my wide-billed, white cap with a dirty green “John Deer” cap whose bill had been studiously curved so that I felt like I was looking through a telescope. “There. Not bad,” she said, like a dyke Henry Higgins, admiring her newly-transformed Eliza Doolittle. “Work boots would be better, but I guess those are okay,” she said, nodding at my Nike hiking boots.

I looked in the mirror and saw a slightly imperfect, but reasonable butch facsimile looking back at me. I longed for the cute, arm-revealing muscle shirt and just a swipe of lip-gloss, but Renee was watching, so I restrained myself and headed over to KJ's.

Music

When I got there, KJ opened the door and said, "Hey, pretty good! Cool shirt."

"Thanks, I said." It's Renee's. She dressed me. She said the shorts aren't right."

"Yeah. The hem. But the rest is pretty good."

"Your shorts are hemmed, too" I said.

"That's different," she replied. "Mine are work shorts. Painters and builders wear them. Yours are just . . . well, girl shorts."

I knew she was right – I could see for myself there was something butcher about her tan, knee-length Karhart work shorts with the studs on the pockets and the side slot for a screw-driver. I pondered the semiotics of butch, wondering how I could fetishize something so single-mindedly, lusting after the all the items on the butch banquet table that is San Francisco, and yet be so inept at reproducing the look. This is why people think gender is natural, I realized... because it's so hard to imitate a new one once you've learned the first. Like learning a second language after age 7.

Music

Half an hour later, as I stepped out of the moving van, two women walked by checking me out. One of them looked me in the eyes boldly and smiled, turning her head to keep looking as she passed, taking a slow tour of my body.

"KJ!" I tugged on her sleeve. "KJ!"

"Yeah? What's up?"

"Those ladies were looking at me! Like, looking at me!" I told her excitedly.

"Fun, ain't it?" She smiled, going back to work.

I nodded and watched as the women walked away.

As we climbed the steps to the client's house, I took off my cap and lifted my thick hair off my neck, gathering it in a high ponytail at the crown of my head in preparation for a day of heavy sweating. "Nope, nope, nope," KJ whispered urgently from behind me on the stairs. I dropped the pony tail and re-capped my head quickly as we approached the door. We rang the bell and the client, a femme dyke with long curly hair and a tan came to the door to let us in. A neighbor opened her own door at the same time.

"Hey, are you guys professional movers?" the pretty, blonde neighbor shouted, nodding at the truck.

I only missed one beat before replying, with the curtness of a dyke-of-few-words, "Sure are."

"They're highly recommended," our client told the neighbor. "And not bad to look at, either." The two women smiled lecherously and knowingly at each other.

I stood there in shock, Oh my god! They think I'm a stud! What should I say? What should I do? Of course, the answer to both of these questions for a proper stud is, "Nothing," which is fortunate, because that was all I was able to do.

"Can I get your card?" the neighbor asked. I looked at KJ, who coolly pulled a card from her pocket and offered to do a quick estimate right then and there.

As she followed the neighbor into her house, I was left alone with the client, who led me upstairs to show me what things to move and to consult with me about taking apart her bed frame. I felt vaguely worried that up in the apartment, without KJ's butchness camouflaging me, I would be unable to fool this other femme for long, that I would walk the wrong way, smile too much, or let slip some comment about her cute curtains.

Music

Once upstairs, I fought to keep from smiling sympathetically when she apologized for the packing job. Instead, I said "Ten-Four" a lot, the way KJ did. Then she showed me her wrought-iron bed frame and asked timidly if I could take it apart. I looked as knowingly as possible at the bolts holding the frame together, then at the pliers she'd been trying to use on them, and nodded. "No problem. We got right tools for that in the truck," I bluffed, having no idea what, in fact, was in the mysterious but masculine-looking bag KJ had packed for the job. "Great," she replied, confident in my confidence. "Alright then, I'll just go run some errands." Seeing my pretense at mechanical know-how so easily accepted and

reflected back at me, I found myself believing in my own abilities. I also found myself wondering how many times I'd bought into this bluff of masculinity, this "Got-it-all-under-control-with-my-tools" act.

Music

As she was leaving, KJ showed up and asked the client for a run-through, but the client told her, "I already told . . . uh . . . Jenny." (When I heard how un-butch my name sounded in context, I made a mental note to give my alter-ego a more convincing name.) "She can tell you what needs to get moved where." KJ raised her eyebrows, looking nervous about my ability to relay this complex, masculine information, but not wanting to blow our collective cover.

"Ten-four," she said.

Music

My day as a butch taught me a lot about masculinity – how much it is valued – even in lesbian communities -- and how complicated it is. We think of femininity – the make-up, the lingerie, the endless painful methods of hair removal – as artificial, a kind of costume. And yet my adventure in butchness involved just as much effort and just as much masquerade as a typical day for a high-femme glamour girl. I don't think I'll be switching from team-femme to team-butch any day soon, but my adventure gave me a new appreciation for complexity, strength and beauty of this thing we call butch.

Close Jenny:

DG: Writer Jenny Worley, who will complete her doctoral dissertation on twentieth century lesbian literature and culture any minute now, lives in San Francisco.

Once again, if you're confused about the differences between the terms dyke, lesbian, butch and femme, even nelly, take a moment and visit our website for an explanation. [OutrightRadio.org](http://OutrightRadio.org)

That's it for today's show.

ORR is produced in collaboration with KXCI in Tucson, Arizona. Senior editor for our show is Jesse Rose DeRooy with assistance from Joan Schuman. Our business manager is John Brennan. Special thanks to Ben Haggard, Tim Olcott and Wessie Russell.

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This is David Gilmore - thanks for joining us.

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