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A Different Way of Being

Kylie: Tattooed, Leather Wearing, Motorbike Riding, Butch Bear and Most-Op M.T.F. Transsexual

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I was no longer interested in trying to live up to other people's expectations of who I should be or how I should live my life.

On my Internet web page I describe myself as a tattooed, leather wearing, motorbike riding butch bear who is also a most-op M.T.F. transsexual. All of these are facets of my identity, each contributing to make the whole of who I am. In addition to this, some of these facets of my identity are apparently contradictory, M.T.F. and butch for example. Rather than being a negative though, I think this helps to dismantle some of the stereotypes about butches and M.T.F.s.

I have not been butch all my life. When I first transitioned I did what was expected of me and did the feminine thing - long blond hair, make-up, skirts/frocks ... the whole deal

I can't honestly say if I have known I was either M.T.F. or butch since birth. Since I was born male I guess the butch facet is open for debate. And unlike many other M.T.F. transsexuals, I never had the feeling of being a girl. For me it was more a case of not knowing exactly where I fitted into a gendered world, I didn't feel like a boy or a girl. Maybe because of this none of the facets of my identity are static. I know that certainly hasn't been the case so far.

As I have already said, I was born male and have for at least part of my life lived in a way that some butches appear to idolize. I grew up in a working class suburb of Auckland, New Zealand. From my teenage years on, I hung out with working class guys drinking, working on hot rods, doing drugs, driving fast, getting married, having kids etc. To me this has little

to do with being butch but this history does show itself in the way I am butch.

I have not been butch all my life. When I first transitioned I did what was expected of me and did the feminine thing, long blond hair, make-up, skirts/frocks ... the whole deal. I got to a point where this felt as fake to me as when I had been trying to live as a man so I stopped doing it. I still looked/appeared feminine but I spent a lot of time (six years) trying to work out just who I was. I was no longer interested in trying to live up to other people's expectations of who I should be or how I should live my life. At the end of this time I had moved to Australia, met new people and had come-out as a dyke even though at this stage I had never heard of any other M.T.F. dykes.

Even when I came-out it wasn't as a butch. I came-out in 1993 as a dyke into a community that was dominated by andro and 1980s feminist lesbians. 'Tranny', 'Butch' and 'Femme' were dirty words in this community. 'Butch' and 'Femme' were only used as jokes and as a way of putting people down.

If transsexuals were even mentioned it was not in any positive way. The thing was, I was curious about just what butch and femme were about and how I could make these terms fit with my emerging identity as a butch. Fortunately it was about this time that I discovered the Internet and the wonders of things called mailing or discussion lists.

The first lists that I got on were lists like Sappho and Dykenet, lists run by and for the general lesbian community and predominately U.S.. Not a particularly supportive environment for a M.T.F. trannie and emerging butch.

But it was while on these lists that I came across my first positive images of butches, femmes and gender-queers. Strong voices of butches and femmes defending their identity to hordes of unbelievers. People who were proud of their histories and their identities as butches and femmes. It was from these folk that I started my learning process. I started to see book titles being mentioned in relation to butch/femme. I was also invited to join a list called 'Boychicks'. On 'Boychicks' I got to discuss what butch/femme meant to other people who self-identified as either butch or femme. This gave me an insight into the various ways people defined butch and femme. Through this and the reading that I did, I worked out a way I could be butch, M.T.F. and be true to myself.

I am not one of those butches who you will see wearing a suit and tie or a tux, they simply don't work for me. I guess I go back to my roots and show my butch-ness through more traditional working class clothes like t-shirts, jeans, boots, leather vest and jacket. But I am a different butch today than I was four or five years ago. As I learn more about myself and others around me, my way of being

butch changes and shifts to reflect my journey through life. For example I now add 'bear' to my identity and that in turn is now part of the way I am butch.

Though I transitioned quite a while ago (late 1980s) I didn't have sex reassignment surgery until late in 1997. Up until that point I didn't have the money or the support to have surgery. I had been around a lot of the pro- and anti-surgery debates and they all gave me a headache. I didn't relate to the idea that I 'needed' certain surgical reassignment to make me 'real' or 'complete'. Yet I didn't believe that the reason I wanted the surgery was because I hadn't evolved far enough as a pangendered being yet either.

Hell I just wanted to get rid of that thing. Not that it was ever that big. I was never going to be in a position where the traditional inversion surgery was going to be an option. So much so that my surgeon sent me off for a chromosome test, the test came back 'normal' (XY). I got the results and told my partner that I was normal, which gave us both a laugh.

It's interesting that pre-surgery I found the genital shots in Loren Cameron's *Body Alchemy* really reassuring even though I'm an M.T.F. The shots of metoidioplasty results looked just like I did! It was the first time I'd seen genitals that looked like mine anywhere.

The options for vaginal creation available to me just didn't appeal because I would have been left feeling physically uncomfortable and at my age the types of surgery required to effect them would have been painful and in fact, downright dangerous for someone with my medical history. The main reason I had surgery was to achieve a level of comfort with my body that I just couldn't manage pre-surgery. I was not in it for a fully functioning replica.

Furthermore, as a butch, my main concern was clitoral sensation - not vaginal penetration. So I talked it over with my surgeon and we decided no vagina, just labia and a fully functional clit.

This is a happy surgery story. My girlfriend tells me I was as high as a kite when the bandages came off but I think that may have had a lot to do with the drugs I was on, I don't remember much. I do remember looking down and thinking, "now that looks a lot better". However I did not have a sudden revelation about my inner woman, nor did I comprehend my gender any better than I had before.

I saw my surgeon for the last time in February 1998. I don't need to see him ever again. I feel relieved more than anything else. It works, I can pee straight, I can feel, I can have sex with my girlfriend and feel uninhibited. That'll do me.

I don't believe there is any one way of being butch or a bear. I think there are as many ways of being as there are people who own gender-queer identities and none are more 'right' or 'wrong' than any other. I believe that we can learn from each other and perhaps open ourselves to other ways of being that we may not have thought of.

When I had my S.R.S. I chose not to have a neo-vagina created. As most people see the creation of the vagina as the final stage of the S.R.S. process I call myself a most-op, i.e. by others' standards I haven't had the complete operation.

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