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Looking Butch Through the Years:

Intergenerationality and Gazing in Lesbian Literature and Photography

Miriam Harrow

Skidmore College Department of English

Spring 2022

INTRODUCTION: ***Picturing Butches***

…I want:
crew cuts, soft midriffs, massive arms,
bad tattoos and plaid boxers
daggy-dagger-trendy-leather-elder dykes
dykes with body hair in awkward places…[1]

PICTURE a butch. Can you? What is she wearing? Is ze tall, short, fat, thin, buff? Are they sitting, standing, walking, biking, driving, marching, reading, hammering, lifting? What do his hands look like? What tells you they're a butch? Is ze speaking, or silent? Who do you imagine them standing next to? Where are you imagining him? If I said picture a lesbian, are you picturing a butch? Is butch a lesbian gender? Some butches are women, some are men, some are just dykes – no gender necessary. Who is the butch you're picturing? If it's you, your lover, your friend, or a member of your family (chosen or otherwise), then this thesis is dedicated to you. Particularly if it's you. If it's Lea DeLaria in *Orange is the New Black*, fine. And if it's me, well, that's fine too. If you couldn't picture a butch, don't worry. You'll see some very soon.

Butch is a malleable and evolving lesbian gender category. Just as not all lesbians are butch, not all butches are lesbians. But the word holds a queer historical weight among lesbian communities. Butch is a deeply visible mode of being. It is marginalized masculinity. It can be hardness where softness is supposed to be. Each butch will describe hirself in a distinct way, situating their masculine embodiment differently historically, racially, socio-economically, linguistically, culturally, and otherwise. My own models of butchness come in part from a tall, thin, and handsome white masculinity. The masculinities of my father's weekly dry cleaning and meticulously organized closet, and tight white t-shirts pulled across Robert DeNiro, James Dean, and Marlon Brando's chests in *Taxi Driver, Rebel Without A Cause,* and *A Streetcar Named Desire,* respectively, helped to form my own desired image of masculinity. The young butch, surrounded by their own context-specific expectations of male masculinity and female femininity, learns to construct hir own female masculinity.

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[1] Kait Fenwick, "Archetypal."

Butch Is/Butches

What butch *means* depends on who you ask. It depends on who is asking and who is speaking and who is writing and who is listening and who is capturing and who is posing and who is absent and who is present. Who is butch? Is it *a* butch or is it *butch*; is butch a noun or an adjective? Can you butch? Can I? Can we? That depends who you are, who I am, and what "we" means. I borrow this incessant refusal to define butch from S. Bear Bergman's witty collection of short essays, *Butch is a Noun* (2013). Ze argues that yes, butch is a noun, and it is in fact also a verb and an adjective. It is and it is also and it is not and it is sometimes. Hir title gives you the impression that butch will be easily defined, easily located in the realm of noun, but just a few sentences in hir reader knows it will never be that simple to speak in a butch language. Indeed, noun itself becomes an imprecise category; is butch a person, place, or thing? Look at a butch and ze will have the same effect on you: at first, perhaps you see a man. At second glance, a handsome woman. By your third glance, and this point you're staring and you should probably just look away, but perhaps by your third glance the butch is read as beyond any gender binary you've been taught. Perhaps you feel compelled to ask their pronouns, to try to place them in an internalized gendered hierarchy – really, you're just being polite. The unknowability of butchness, truly, is what makes our presence so exciting, invigorating, and so delightfully confusing.

Butch as a lesbian word has an unclear etymological origin. "Butch" likely descends from the French *boucher*: "butcher." To butch, the verb, once meant to cut up, and butch the adjective was to cut something, such as short hair, or to make (a person, a behavior) more masculine (butch as haircut, "butch it up, Mary!") ("butch…" *OED Online*). Butch was a knife. Butch was a nickname for working-class men who delivered newspapers and collected train tickets (a "news butch," short for "news butcher"). But descending from French, it could also have its roots in *bouc*, "goat," or *bucca,* "a male stag, hare, or goat" (Grahn 146). Goats in ancient French ceremonies played sacrificial and highly important roles, and often a woman in butch drag would take on that role of sacrificed goat-god – like butch ancestor Joan of Arc (146). The butch is magical, lesbian feminist Judy Grahn argues in her queer series of essays and anecdotes, *Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds* (1984). She paints a mystical, stoic picture of the ancient functions of butches, calling cross-dressing a "magical function" (158). She explains, historically, that the butch is "the one who cross-dresses, becomes a hunter or a sooth-sayer or a prophet or the first woman in a formerly all-male occupation. She keeps the idea of biological destiny untenable. She usually takes butchness as a lifelong destiny, irrespective of whether she has a lover" (158). The modern butch, Grahn goes on to say, "is still entitled to wear leather, to decorate her body with tattoos and heavy jewelry, … to walk and carry her body in the way of the old cross-dressing female" (158). Her butch ceremonial ancestry is honorific and beautifying. As the butch does not descend from one particular place (goat or butcher? Stag or newsboy?), contemporary butchness holds all of that historical multiplicity. Butchness, with its etymological trajectory, cannot be singular.

Jack Halberstam attempts to pin down ‘butch,’ just as it evades him, in the preface of one of his first books, *Female Masculinity* (1998). He locates the term with what both Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler have theorized as a *catachresis.*

> The butch is neither cis-gender nor simply transgender, the butch is a bodily catachresis. The Greek word, *catachresis*, means the rhetorical practice of misnaming something for which there would otherwise be no words. Butch is always a misnomer – not male, not female, masculine but not male, female but not feminine, the terms serves as a placeholder for the unassimilable, for that which remains indefinable or unspeakable within the many identifications that we make and that we claim… [The butch] is and she remains a ‘bad’ sexual subject, stranded in illegibility but stubborn in her refusal to simply slip into anachronism (Halberstam xx-xxi).

“Butch” is always describing what is precisely elusive to it. In writing butch texts, we seem to be drawn to opening with inadequate definitions. Butch is… Butch is not… In my butch experience, it feels like… In claiming our voices and speaking our minds in lengthy scholarly or narrative texts, we explain ourselves to our beholders, hoping to reclaim some of that constant butch misrecognition we face in the everyday. So, I settle on butch as catachresis, the rightfully indefinable category of incorrect, abject, misfired, bad masculinity.

BUTCH IS –

a noun, a verb, an adjective –
a word – and not a dirty one –
shoved out of the closet –
readable at a glance –
handsome *ugly* beautiful *grotesque* expansive *magical*
stone *disappearing* illegible *archaic* in the wrong bathroom *lesbian*
gawked at misread *queer* a sign of futurity *loving* sterile
desirable *for femmes only* for butches only *sexy* recognizable
visible *vulnerable* *visible* *vulnerable* *visible* *vulnerable*

Butches Voice/Butch Voices

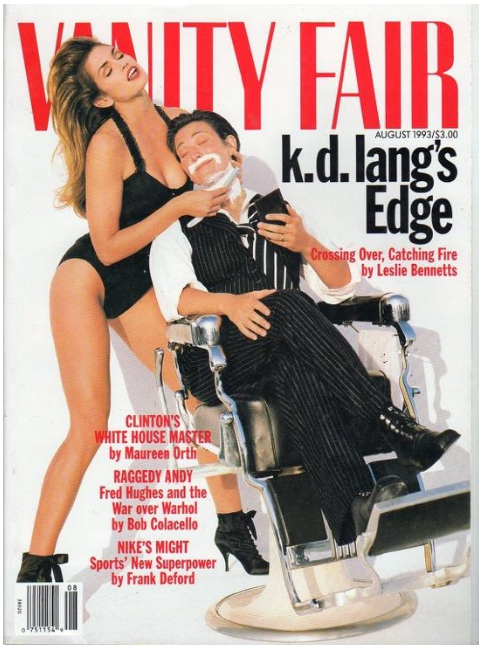
Butch words, or words that insufficiently comprise all that it means to embody butchness, make up our butch stories and our butch worlds. Two highly influential twentieth century memoir-novels written by butch authors are primary objects of this project, my aim being their butch words and authorial images being in conversation with one another. These novels are in the literary company of a twenty first century butch graphic novel. My first chapter discusses Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), while my second chapter's object is Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2005). These works help build a butch literary tradition within a larger queer canon.

The three texts are coming of age stories, bildungsromans of their own queer sort. Following masculine-of-center girls through childhood into adulthood, each one tells a different story of butch lives lived in distinct worlds. Using literature to understand the material embodiments of butchness, I argue that the book is a camera and a mirror and a deeply visual object in the right butch's hands. Their pages show us pieces of ourselves, and their authors reflect butch life back at us. Further, the graphic novel is a uniquely queer form in its ability to convey visual as well as textual information to its reader. Bechdel, acutely aware of the power of this form, tells her butch narrative through her comic-literary lens. In the graphic novel, butch words and images build upon each other. Though Chapter 1 focuses on two non-illustrated novels, the texts themselves have their own visual histories. Alongside their legacy in prose, *The Well of Loneliness* and *Stone Butch Blues* have striking visual accompaniments with their butch authors. Each author has left behind personal photographs that reveal fragmented pieces of their inner lives. The butch on the page – in pen or colored pencil – and the butch in the lens work together to form full narratives of butch being as well as butch *becoming*.

Butches Look/Butches, Look!

This project explores how butches gaze and how their gazes are both shaped and understood by other butches, and how the chosen literary texts build those nuanced photographic gazes. Butch portrait photography gives butches explicit permission to look exactly how they want – not that we need photographic permission to be bold in a world that hates our boldness, but it certainly helps. In my first chapter, I put to use my own butch gaze in discussing two images taken by contemporary butch photographer, Meg Allen. In their portrait series *BUTCH*, which began in 2013, Allen found themself drawn to capturing their butch friends in solo portraits. They started out photographing butches in a strict studio setting: a stiff white background and studio lighting. Capturing butchness in a space designed to construct normative beauty felt viscerally wrong for Allen. So, they shifted to environmental portraits: images taken in the safety of homes, in the comfort of preferred environments, in spaces that felt natural to their subjects (Godoy 30). The project took years to complete, and over time, the butches they captured moved and changed and transitioned and grew. *BUTCH* shows that butchness does not disappear in transition; rather, it expands as their subjects transformed themselves. Different kinds of butches in different stages of their lives fill the pages of Allen's collection.

Meg has their own butch gaze, as they use the camera to capture moments of butchness in others. Simultaneously, the butches they photograph gaze back at them, gaze ahead, gaze into the camera's lens, gaze into or away from mirrors, gaze outward. A butch gaze can frame a story, can frame an image, can instruct a sexual encounter. Butches get quizzical stares and return them with stoic gazes. In the photographic moment of a butch capturing a butch, there is a mutuality to their gaze. Butches see butches differently, and in doing so, reframe what it means to gaze through and into a camera.


VANITY FAIR
AUGUST 1993/$3.00
k.d. lang's Edge
Crossing Over, Catching Fire by Leslie Bennetts
CLINTON'S WHITE HOUSE MASTER by Maureen Orth
RAGGEDY ANDY Fred Hughes and the War over Warhol by Bob Colacello
NIKE'S MIGHT Sports' New Superpower by Frank Deford

"Butch gaze" is a phrase first coined by Jack Halberstam in *Female Masculinity*, but his theory of the butch gaze differs from my own. Not equivalent with the male gaze, he argues, the butch gaze queers the subject position of the film spectator and their identification with images. He uses the term to discuss butches in films: the ways that butches look, and the ways that different audiences look at butches. It is relational: the butch's femme counterpart always looks queerer in comparison to them (as he demonstrates with this 1993 *Vanity Fair* cover featuring Cindy Crawford and k.d. lang) (Halberstam 176). He uses this photographic example of butch desired looking to enter into his chapter "Looking Butch: A Rough Guide to Butches on Film."

His framing of the butch gaze develops, in part, in response to feminist theorist Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," the essay that introduced the concept of the "male gaze." The "more queer butch gaze," Halberstam argues, forms an "unholy alliance" with the male gaze in this cover photo by "positing a conventional heterosexual pinup as the object of butch lesbian desire" (Halberstam 175). This male gaze, Mulvey's male gaze, constructs this relationship between spectator and male protagonist: "as the spectator identifies with the male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence" (810). Thus, "by means of identification with him, through participation in his power, the spectator can indirectly possess [female characters onscreen]” (811). Halberstam queers the male gaze using the *Vanity Fair* cover. His protagonist here is butch, and the desire exhibited through the camera’s lens, and thus its spectators, is lesbian desire. This cover thus queers all spectators’ receptions: “a heterosexual male must access his desire for Crawford only through the masculinity of a lesbian; a straight woman might identify with Crawford and desire lang; a queer viewer finds that dyke desire is mobile here and may take up butch, femme, masculine, or feminine spectator positions” (176). Halberstam argues that this visual representation of queer masculinity mirrors dominant images of heterosexuality while queering male gazers into potentially engaging in a butch subject position. Butch-femme eroticism made legible to heterosexual readers on the cover of *Vanity Fair* is just one queer butch gazing moment that Halberstam unpacks. My work comes in where his leaves off, moving butch photographic gazing from the 1993 cover to 2010s butch portrait photography. If this cover photograph invites any viewer to gaze as a butch does at the sexualized femme, to experience butch lesbian desire through a subject-identification with the butch in the image, then what is the queer potential of removing the femme and eroticizing the butch on hir own? Removing the necessity of remaining legible to a male gaze, what happens when images are made by butches for butches of butches? This multiplied butch gaze opens up the larger conversation that is my new proposal of the butch gaze after Halberstam, after *Female Masculinity*.

Photographing while butch, gazing while butch: these acts are pretty commonplace among lesbians. A femme blushes as a butch looks her up and down from across the bar. Two butches lock eyes on a street corner, knowing in that moment that they are familiar and safe. We see each other, but we don’t always let the rest of the world see us. Furthermore, a butch photographic gaze turns the potential of butch recognition outward, allowing in possible unwanted viewers in the process of a larger project. A butch lugs their heavy camera around, dangling from their neck, its bulky lens resting gently beneath their chest. She uses it to observe her world through a distanced lens, as any photographer does. The butch photographer capturing images of their beloved butch family puts forth a butch gaze that may then be shared by the rest of the world, taken in by viewers butch, queer, or otherwise.

In the midst of Meg Allen's *BUTCH* project, Australian photographer and emerging butch Esther Godoy discovered these butch images and transformed Allen's singular project into her own independent publication: *Butch Is Not A Dirty Word*. It began as an online magazine, and eventually grew into print, a regular Patreon.com publication, and a merchandise brand. Godoy lacked butch community in Australia, and so she moved to Portland, Oregon to find the butch haven that Allen captured in the beginning of their project. Godoy herself appears in the *BUTCH* series. Both of these butches use their photographic gazes and their voices to promote butch beauty and visibility, sending it out into the world with sliding-scale accessible prices. From Allen and Godoy at the very least, the butch gaze is something to be shared and made accessible to as many folks as possible.

Butch Is Not a Dirty Word has eight editions currently in print, with the ninth forthcoming this summer (2022). For the purposes of this project, I have consulted the first seven and have cited largely from issue 3, the intergenerational issue. This edition explores what intergenerational relationships – familial, romantic, friendship, work, etc. – look and feel like among butches. I use this image-text intergenerational relationship to work toward a greater understanding of how butches see butches who are unknowable to them in age, perhaps, yet somehow deeply knowable in image and shared history.

The first chapter opens with Meg Allen's self-portrait from the *BUTCH* collection, a portrait in which they face away from a large bedroom mirror. After Allen, I raise questions of literary mirrors, beginning with a tragic childhood encounter with a mirror in *The Well of Loneliness*. Young butch protagonist, Stephen, feels pity and cruelty upon viewing her naked self in the mirror. I place this moment in conversation with *Stone Butch Blues*, visiting various moments in which its protagonist, Jess, faces her butch self in the mirror. In order to fully understand the rhetorical weight and queer histories of these novels, the image-legacies of these butch authors, Feinberg and Hall, will become of equal import to their writings. Portraits and mirror selfies of these two butch ancestors bring their images into the literary conversation of butch gazing. In the 64 years between the publications of these novels, and the wide generational gap between their authors, what has changed about the ways that butches write about butches? Do mirrors still spark fear and angst in the adolescent butch, or is there a potential for new ways of seeing? In this chapter, I argue that although the butch gaze is surely a photographic and cinematic term, it extends into new worlds: the mirror and the novel. Mirrored butch gazing in literature is integral context for understanding contemporary butch portraiture. What can a fictional butch looking in her mirror tell us about the reading butch or the photographing butch? What can literary – and photographic – mirrors reveal to their spectators? This chapter opens with an exploration into what a mirror is and what a mirror can be, and ends with a second portrait from Meg Allen's *BUTCH*, in which butch subject "Jenna" stands in front of a mirror, gazing away from it. The chapter is framed by two butches looking away from mirrors in their homes, contextualized by literary explorations of two butch novels, asking of each author and creator, what is the mirror contributing to developing butch gazes?

The second chapter explores what the butch looks like from behind, or, what it feels like to look at a butch who cannot yet see you. That butch is rendered illegible to their onlooker, and upon turning around or opening their mouth, might spark even more confusion. But, as I will argue in this chapter, this illegible butch provides necessary visibility to young or closeted queers who have not yet accepted or come to understand their butch selves. The recognition moments that butches give to not-yet-butches, as many of us call the “ring of keys” moment, is captured on the page by butch cartoonist and writer Alison Bechdel in her graphic memoir, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2005). This chapter analyzes young Alison’s moment of recognition in depth and the multifaceted butch gazes that emerge from it. Bechdel’s memoir provides a literary backdrop for the photographic fixation some butches have had with capturing butch backs. In *Female Masculinity*, Jack Halberstam discusses the androgyny of backs, the denial of access to one’s gender in being read from behind. I argue that the back, or beholding a butch from behind, enables an interesting discursive space of both recognition and misrecognition. This misrecognition will be explored on the street (in public), as well as on the page, and lastly in the camera. In discussing young Alison’s transformative moment of recognition, I argue that an Althusserian mode of analysis is necessary to fully understand the creation of the butch subject. I put Louis Althusser’s theory of interpellation to use in this complex moment of butch subject-Butch Subject viewing. The older butch *hails* the younger, unsuspecting butch, simply by existing in her fullness. My analytical chapters come to a close with a final discussion of *Butch Is Not a Dirty Word*: issue 3 the intergenerational issue. Intergenerational community, I argue, is integral to butch subject formation and the persistence of butches existing in public.

My conclusion returns to butch portraiture in the twentieth century with a larger inquiry into *Well of Loneliness* author Radclyffe Hall and her portraits. I raise questions of presentation, style, and, as Susan Sontag defines it, the camp sensibility. I bring forth the idea of the butch dandy in the twentieth and twenty-first century, weighing their differences and similarities, and positioning them in conversation with one another.

All throughout, I am joining in on a conversation across generations of butches: those who came before, those in the present, and those who will occupy the world to come. I invite you to look – respectfully – closely at these butches, and to ultimately try to see them as they see themselves and each other. This thesis invites you, whoever you are, into the intergenerational workings of the butch gaze.

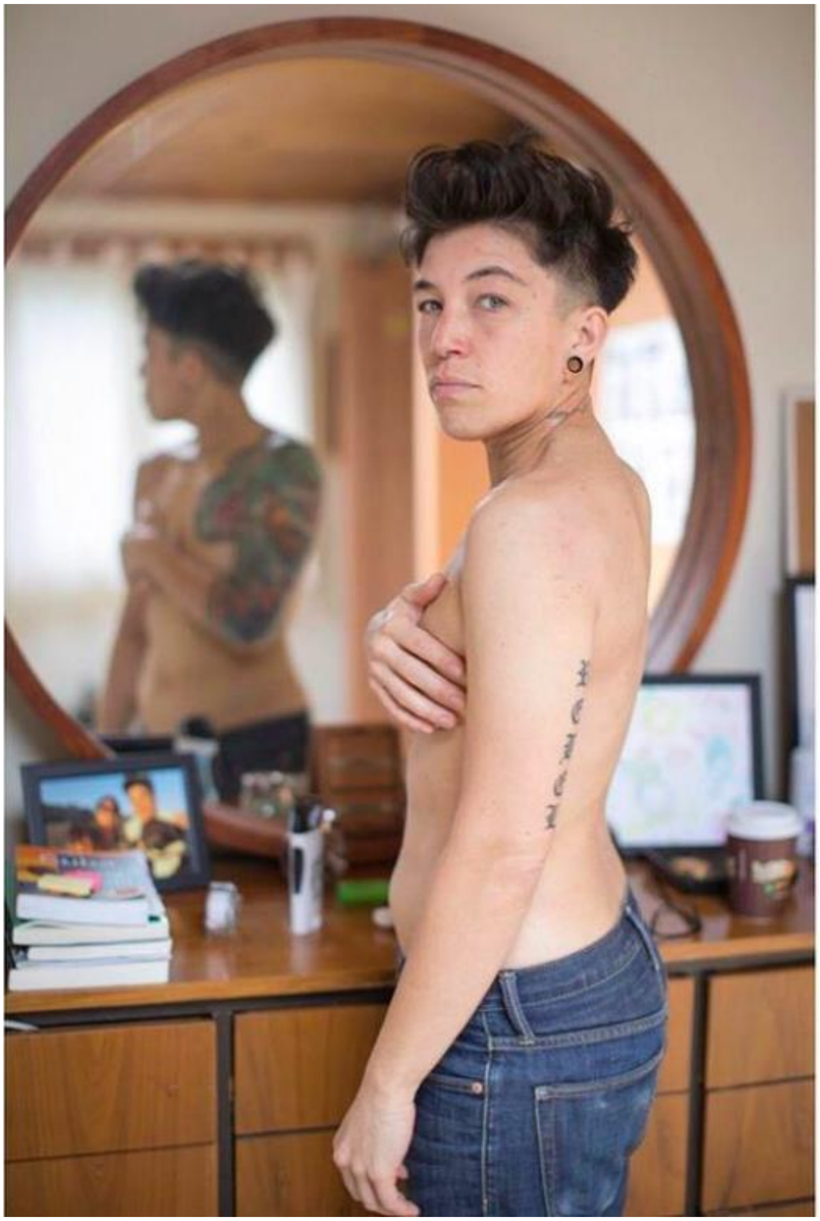
CHAPTER 1: *BUTCH REFLECTIONS*

A MIRROR can be a heavy-handed literary object, placed in a scene to reveal something a character does not or does not *yet* see. It can at once point toward a future and reflect a fraught past. It can obscure one's view of self. Mirrors can reflect themselves in an infinite, dizzying mise en abyme. A mirror is a form of viewing oneself that seems to hold a certain visible truth, an undeniable presence. We believe mirrors, sometimes more than we believe cameras or even ourselves. Looking into a mirror can reveal the remnants of past familial ties – that is, family by blood, or by choice.

What happens when, in a world that calls you ugly, you look in the mirror? Or: how does a butch look upon herself in the mirror? What are they seeing, how are they seeing it, and how do they shape their gaze outward following the reflection inward that a mirror provokes? Moreover, is a mirror limited to being that reflective glass that we hang upon our walls? Can a person be a mirror? Can a camera? Can a monocle? Can a glass dildo? Can a computer screen? Can a river - or a well? Can a dirty window? Yes, and many more objects, places, and experiences can act as mirrors, too. A photograph, a novel, a scar, a tattoo, a stain. The mirror is an intergenerational space through which queer and butch world-building can occur. This chapter is about mirrored looking in a traditional sense, sure, but it opens up a wide range of butch modes of seeing, being, and becoming. Often seeing oneself as butch and whole is not a first step for us, though the self is likely the first or most frequent butch we see. Butches may begin by recognizing another butch but not quite knowing what to make of their identification with that stranger. Eventually, if we're lucky, we learn to see beauty in that butch and for some, desire. After viewing butchness in another, mirrored eye contact with our butch selves can transform, and a coming home to the butchness in the self begins. Butch ancestors are often found in our own selves, in our mirrors, as we search for truths that heal. Butch in the wild, butch in my arms, butch in my mirror – all are beautiful and worthy of that self-affirming gaze. This chapter begins and ends with butches *not* looking at themselves in the mirrors present in their photographed rooms. Instead, they gaze at their butch photographer, or their camera. The bulk of this chapter will address what butches see when they look in the mirror, but I am first interested in the question of what butches see when they choose to look *away* from it.

My inquiry into butch mirrored looking began with a number of images from Meg Allen's *BUTCH* portrait series, in which a pattern of mirrors emerges among several butches. Allen's framing of their portraits in the form of environmental portraiture – taking pictures in places the subjects felt most comfortable – included the strategic placement of mirrors for some. Notably, Allen includes a self-portrait with an obscured mirror in the background, their body and gaze turned away from it. What do they reveal in obscuring an object that functions as a means to view oneself in a self-portrait?

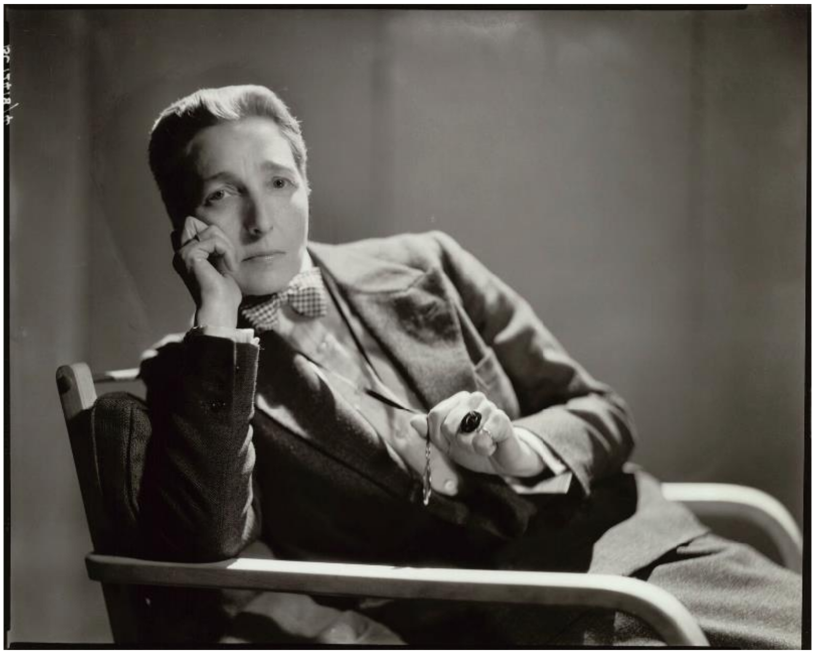
In the below self-portrait, Allen gazes into the camera while a circular mirror frames their upper body. Their reflection is blurred. In fact, they seem altogether uninterested in what the mirror has to say about them. Their gaze leaves the image and enters the realm of their viewer. In other words, their gaze meets the viewer's. The mirror is blurred, their reflection less intelligible inside its reflective frame. Their reflection looks in a complete opposite direction to their supposed in-focus self. Where is that mirrored-self looking? Backward? Into the past? The subject-self is looking directly at their viewer in an almost provocative way. They are aware that they are not alone in the room, but they are also not acknowledging the company of their own mirrored image, Instead of intruding on an intimate moment of self-reflection in the mirror, we are making direct eye contact with someone who seems to actually be looking at us, searching for something within their own viewer's eyes.



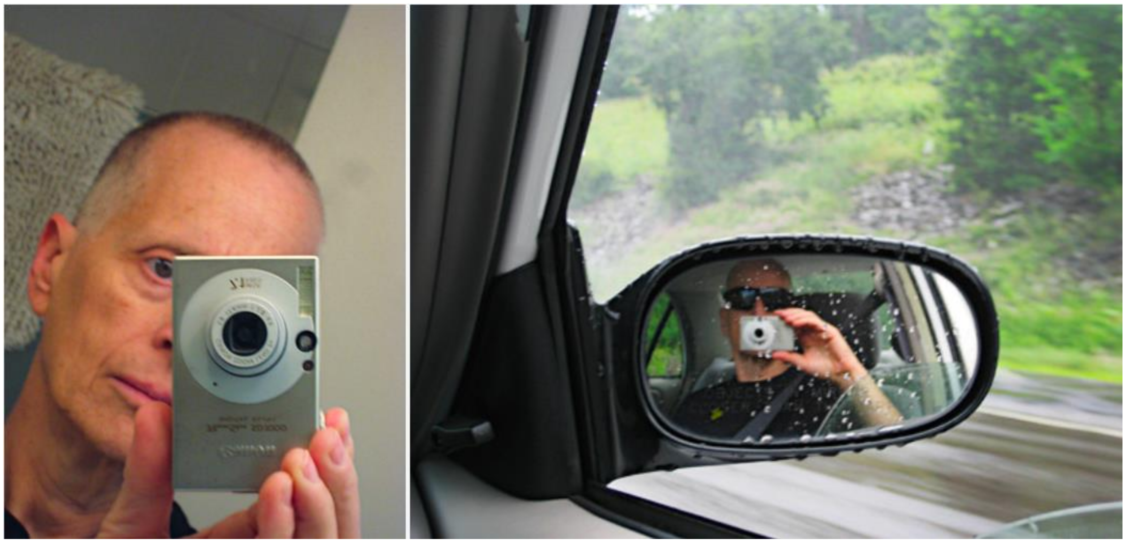
Meg covers their chest softly with a hand and arm. They stand up straight, tilted away from the camera, head turned toward it. As they turn their face away from the mirror, their body remains slightly pointed toward it. The diagonal position of their body places their subjectivity at odds with both camera and mirror. Being a self-portrait, the camera they gaze into is their own, and the camera's reflective lens becomes a new mirror. They have a number of tattoos, all rendered illegible by the angles and foci of their camera. Presumably a coherent word, in a gothic font, lines the back of their upper arm, and a massive colorful tattoo covers their mirrored reflection. Their spectator thus cannot decipher what either of these are in a straightforward, clear reality.

To position oneself in intentional illegibility with a mirror and camera is to unleash a multifaceted butch gaze upon the viewer who approaches such an image. Their facial expression, their turned back, their stance, their chest – all do not evoke a singularly gendered being. The person we see in this image is not gazing at what the bedroom mirror (stable, imposing, limiting) shows them. The photographer's choice to place a mirror in the frame and turn away from it is a form of gazing and composition that becomes uniquely butch in their work. The butch is often illegible to their own self in the mirror, but the camera makes possible a communal form of gazing that enters their image into a queer world of looking.

To understand contemporary butch mirrored gazing, it is crucial to understand the literary-historical context that Allen's portrait series followed. This chapter will discuss the mirror scenes in two classic lesbian novels written by two butches who had their own very divergent relationships to cameras. The first mirror scene comes from *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), which was written by John Radclyffe Hall, a British masculine lesbian, who often had stylized portraits taken of herself. The second novel is *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), a novel whose since deceased author, butch and trans writer/activist Leslie Feinberg, has a photo archive on hir website via a link to a Flickr web page. For these two butches, writing was their most visible and impactful creative outlet, and though that remains the case for many contemporary butch creatives, the accessibility of photography today is surely beyond what, at the very least, Radclyffe Hall could have imagined. Leslie Feinberg died in 2014; ze lived to see social media and digital cameras, but not Meg Allen's *BUTCH* series. The images below of the respective authors contextualize in part how they each presented themselves to the world and the kinds of images that they chose to describe themselves.



Radclyffe Hall, 1932 by Howard Coster via National Portrait Gallery



Two images from Leslie Feinberg's album "assorted/unsorted," taken June/July 2009

These authors, both quite conscious of their otherness and the ways it appeared in images, curated visual legacies alongside their literary ones. The images of Feinberg I have included are both mirror selfies, while that of Hall is a posed portrait taken by a male professional photographer, Howard Coster. Feinberg looks almost as if ze is taking a photo of hir onlooker – as if ze is not even the subject of the photograph, whereas Hall is clearly the posed subject of her own. Image-legacies that accompany butch lives lived in the recent past draw together these three artists, Hall, Feinberg, and Allen, creating an intergenerational visual butch dialogue between them. In our current digital age, or, Allen's piece of this butch puzzle, butch creatives need not be elite to have their photos taken, and their photographers (if not themselves) need not impose male gazes. As Feinberg's mirror selfies seem to capture hir onlooker instead of hirself, perhaps Allen's butch camera similarly offers a mirror for butches to see themselves in – that mirror ultimately being the photographs in the *BUTCH* series.

I began this chapter with a butch *not* looking in the mirror. Looking away from a mirror and into a camera, operated by and for butches, was not a common occurrence in the early twentieth century, when *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) takes place. Rather, a cruel moment occurs in *The Well of Loneliness* as a young butch faces her reflection, a moment that will be illuminated through the conditions of butch gazing. Protagonist Stephen has been mannish her whole life, dissatisfied with her body and its shortcomings, and wholly understands herself as an invert.[2] She is the daughter of wealthy parents who leave her with quite a fortune; her story loosely mirrors Hall's own life story. Hall's biography has been well documented, from romantic relationships, to her family, to her wealth, her involvement in the first world war, as well as the literary merit of the novel and the obscenity trial it and Hall faced in England following its publication.[3] Above all of these thematic and contextual pieces of the novel, what becomes most relevant here in the context of butch gazing and particularly the language of Stephen's adolescent butch mirrored gazing.

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[2] Inversion is a 19th century sexology term, referring to someone who has the 'spirit' of the opposite sex they were assigned at birth, thus making their sexual aims "inverted" (homosexual). Radclyffe Hall saw herself as an invert throughout her life, and notable sexologist Havelock Ellis, who contributed to discourses of inversion, provided a commentary introducing *The Well of Loneliness*. More early theories of inversion can be found in: "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" by Sigmund Freud (1905), *A Problem in Modern Ethics, being an inquiry into the phenomenon of sexual inversion,* by John Addington Symonds (1896), and *Psychopathia Sexualis* by Richard von Kraft-Ebing (1889).

[3] For more on Radclyffe Hall, the banning of *The Well of Loneliness*, inversion in the 20th century, and literary critiques of *The Well of Loneliness,* see: *Female Masculinity* by Jack Halberstam, "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman" by Esther Newton, "The Aristocracy of Intellect: Inversion and Inheritance in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*" by Susan Watkins, and biographies: *Our Three Selves* by Michael Baker, *The Life of Radclyffe Hall* by Una Troubridge, and *Radclyffe Hall: A Woman Called John* by Sally Cline.

On a most dreadful evening, Stephen encounters her reflection. Hall, at length, describes Stephen's pitiful feelings:

> That night she stared at herself in the glass; and even as she did so she hated her body with its muscular shoulders, its small compact breasts, and its slender flanks of an athlete. All her life she must drag this body of hers like a monstrous fetter imposed on her spirit. This strangely ardent yet sterile body that must worship yet never be worshipped in return by the creature of its adoration. She longed to maim it, for it made her feel cruel; it was so white, so strong and so self-sufficient; yet withal so poor and unhappy a thing that her eyes filled with tears and her hate turned to pity. She began to grieve over it, touching her breasts with pitiful fingers, stroking her shoulders, letting her hands slip along her straight thighs—Oh, poor and most desolate body! … [She found] few words that seemed worthy of prayer, few words that seemed to encompass her meaning – for she did not know the meaning of herself (Hall 187).

The language of this passage is violent yet tragic. She hates her body, and it is strange, and she grieves over it, and it is never to be worshipped, and her hatred turns to pity. Lacking the words for herself, as well as non-male images of masculinity as models of butch self-representation, the cruelty of the world is internalized in Stephen's cruel understanding of herself. Stephen longs to "maim her body; for it made her feel cruel" (Hall 187). Jack Halberstam notes that her sense of incompleteness alone is itself a maiming of the body (Halberstam 101).[4] Different queer readings of "maim" can bring about different meanings, like those of surgery, modification, and self-harm. What emerges here is an early site of maiming in a pre-discursive moment for widespread queer bodily modification discourses. "Maim" has quite a violent connotation, one of destruction and pain. Stephen longed to hurt her own body because it evoked a cruelty in her, due in part to her disconnection from it. Her point of access to her body became cruelty because she lacked language to understand herself – Stephen found “few words that seemed to encompass her meaning – for she did not know the meaning of herself” – she longed for a world that could reflect her embodied experience (Hall 187). Though a well-behaved Foucauldian would argue that words, particularly identity words, do not fully liberate us, and would therefore not have fully liberated Stephen, it is clear that she sought a world of better words. In addition to lacking the words for herself, Stephen lacked a world of butch visibility, and instead was surrounded by cis-heterosexuality. She saw no butches out in the world, and thus had no way to picture a cruelty-free future in her body. So, the only option Stephen’s mirror could present to her was that of cruelty, to desire a maiming of her otherness, and to live solemnly within that pitiful body.

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[4] In "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman" (1984), butch lesbian anthropologist Esther Newton traced Hall's butchness through the history of what she calls the "mannish lesbian," and laid the foundation for Jack Halberstam to dive deep into female masculinity in his book of the same title. Though Newton quotes this scene at length in her essay, she analyzes it only briefly. Her analysis focuses on Stephen's alienation from her body. Halberstam builds off of this alienation, and further explores the contradictions that lie in this passage: strength and pity, masculinity and femininity, "self-admiration and self-hatred" (Halberstam 102).

Modification of the body is not a new concept nor is it an antiquated one; rather, maiming is just a particularly cruel word for it. Stephen longs to maim her body – who is a twenty-first century reader to say what maiming she desired? Perhaps she wanted to cover herself in tattoos, or piercings, or some other such modification that is highly prevalent among butches today (see: Meg Allen’s various large tattoos, and nearly every other tattooed subject in *BUTCH*). But Stephen did not want to *change* or *modify* her body; she wanted to maim it out of the cruelty she felt toward herself, the pity. What I keep coming back to in this moment is a question queer poet Ocean Vuong raises in his book *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*. Regarding the violent words we use to discuss productivity and success, like killing and crushing and nailing: “why can’t the language for creativity be the language of regeneration?” (Vuong 179). Could a shift from “maiming” to “modification” or “affirming care” *be* that move from violence to regeneration: to rid oneself of something cruel and to replace it with something new, regenerative, self-affirming?

For Stephen, in facing herself in the mirror, cruelty is both her way into herself and her escape out of herself. Stephen Gordon is one of the earliest and most notorious literary butches. Her gaze is undoubtedly butch, in a world that is not-yet-butch, not-yet allowed to be butch. Why can't the language of our bodies be not the language of cruelty but the language of possibility? Stephen inhabited a world of cruel, dirty words that were thrown at people who looked and felt like she did. Her depth of sadness in the mirror has her begging for a less harsh existence, one of joy and light – one of euphoria, one of utopia. She is not-yet-butch, just as José Esteban Muñoz posits that our world is not-yet-queer (Muñoz 1). This regeneration of language may be a queer direction for intergenerationality to take when it comes to butch art and production, as well as embodiment. A regenerative utopia is one we (queers, butches, deviants, inverts) continue to search for: one with many words for ourselves, and without cruel words.

Hall knows that a queer future may lie ahead for the future Stephens of the world. She knows this because the book ends on a note of collective consciousness, far different from any rhetoric previously seen in the novel. As the novel comes to a close, Stephen comes home to her inherited estate, seemingly empty but teeming with ghosts. Stephen is haunted by her past as she moves about, new memories following her into each subsequent room. In her own bedroom, alone with her dog, she is suddenly overwhelmed by voices shouting seemingly within her own mind. First, they encircle her, and then they become her. They cry:

> 'We are coming, Stephen – we are still coming on, and our name is legion – you dare not disown us!'…They possessed her. Her barren womb became fruitful – it ached with its fearful and sterile burden. It ached with the fierce yet helpless children who would clamour in vain for their right to salvation (Hall 437).

These not-yet-children of Stephen's are a queer future waiting to happen. She need not waste her time on pregnancy, for our queer lives may carry on without that technicality of reproductive life. Her womb is fruitful yet sterile, similar to the mounting contradictions she saw that time long ago in the mirror (destined to never be worshipped as she worshipped those of her lovers). Her body is possessed by a disembodied collective, her reproductive imperative taken away from the singular family unit and rather given to the world of queer children.

As these voices enter Stephen, they demand: "'…acknowledge us, oh God, before the whole world. Give us also the right to our existence!'" (Hall 437). In this final sentence of the novel, Stephen becomes a part of this 'we,' this 'us' demanding a right to exist under state and religious structures. These repeated "we"s also appear in some of Leslie Feinberg's last writings before hir death. In the twentieth anniversary edition of *Stone Butch Blues*, Feinberg includes a note "On Pronouns" at the very end of the novel. Ze writes: "My own pronoun usage has had to be complex because of overlapping oppressions. But in recent years, I have become as concerned with the pronoun *we* as I am with the pronouns *she*, *he* and *ze*" (Feinberg 393). Ze points hir readers to some of hir further writing on collectivism and pronoun usage, and elaborates on the particular use of the *we* pronoun.[5] What is fascinating here is that, at the beginning of the century that ended with *Stone Butch Blues*, Hall ended her book with repeated *we* pronouns. This *we*, both of their *we*'s, are looking for communities – looking for others to join them. Across space, time, and generations, there is a butch call for collectivism by these two authors. They are in search of who will continue to construct *us* in the future. Hall suggests children and outcasts, and Feinberg suggests inter-class, interracial, inter-sexual coalitions. Perhaps the *we* is what happens when we look in the mirror and we are suddenly fragmented into two selves: the one of flesh and the one of light. Perhaps the *we* is the two mouths that open to speak to each other, the four eyes that gaze into each other, the infinite mise en abyme reflection of ourselves in the butch mirror.

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[5] Ze references two articles they wrote on collectivity and *we* pronouns: "Many Histories Converged at Stonewall," and "Honoring LaTeisha Green."

Perhaps the *we* is a call for us to reflect our own selves in the world as we see ourselves in the mirror: to present our own images as we understand them for a gaze that can match our own.

Published nearly seventy years after *The Well of Loneliness*, Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) presents some of these same unanswerable questions of community through mirrored looking. A cruel world of mid-to-late twentieth century New York provided a different kind of access to language for stone butch Jess Goldberg:[6] one of he-shes and butch-femme love. *Stone Butch Blues* is a classic of queer fiction, a book freely available to download on Leslie Feinberg's website, a novel often recommended to gender deviants of all kinds. Jess is our mid-century butch tour guide. Jess, much like Stephen, is a misfit and a tomboy from the start. But unlike Stephen, Jess neither grows up with nor inherits wealth. Her upbringing in Buffalo, New York is harsh and lonely, and her models of masculinity come from emulating that of her father – a working-class factory masculinity that accompanies her for the rest of her life. Jess had no models of non-normative gender embodiment in her early life, and so sees herself as an anomaly.

Feinberg shows us pieces of Jess's childhood, notably, one being a moment in which she experiences the euphoric rush of sneaking into her father's wardrobe to try on his suit. A brief unexpected glimpse of joy, a moment of relief escaping her ungendered body, Jess "put on the suit coat and looked in the mirror. A sound came from her throat, sort of a gasp. She liked the little girl looking back at her" (Feinberg 19). In a silent moment alone with herself, Jess is content with her reflection. Notably, there is a sound emanating from her body, but no words escape as she reacts to seeing her authentic butch self. As we watched Stephen Gordon stare at herself and find no words to make meaning of how she understood her embodiment, Feinberg gives us a similar non-discursive moment, but one that is markedly different in tone. Jess *liked* what she saw. She need not have words for it, nor prior images of it, because in the stolen moment she had alone with clothing not meant for her body, she felt more at home than ever before. In this sense, Jess becomes her own butch ancestor. She is unknowingly entering queer public life in the same way many queers do: through private cross-dressing. But without the ability to see those other butches and queers in real life, she works toward imagining herself as the adult role model that she, the child, needed.

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[6] A stone butch is colloquially understood in this way: "The definition of stone butchness–one who is always the sexual actor and is herself untouchable to her partner–calls up references to sexuality, especially butch/fem sexual interaction. Whether stone butches are, in fact, not ever touched sexually is immaterial" (Crawley 17).

After her gasp, Jess continues, imagining what her future may look and feel like: “I stared in the big mirror over my mother’s dresser, trying to see far in the future when the clothing would fit, to catch a glimpse of the woman I would become” (Feinberg 19). Jess is not-yet large enough, present enough, free enough to enter the world in the clothes that properly fit her embodiment. She is surrounded by gendered structures that are not her own: her father’s suit, her mother’s mirror – a binary that endlessly excludes her existence. Gazing into herself and her future, Jess can glimpse what she might look like and is filled with conflicting emotions: “For a moment in that mirror I saw the woman I was growing up to be staring back at me. She looked scared and sad. I wondered if I was brave enough to grow up and be her (Feinberg 20). Brave, yet scared and sad, Jess does not know what the future might hold as the elusive he-she that she is destined to become. She sees a future in herself that she cannot quite name, cannot quite concretely picture because she in fact has never seen a positive image of an adult who reflects it. As she ponders this future, she thinks: “I had never seen any adult woman who looked like I thought I would when I grew up. There were no women in television like the small woman reflected in this mirror, none on the streets. I knew. I was always searching” (Feinberg 20). Looking at herself, Jess could see future, past, inner and outer life, could see a better future in which she could see and be seen in precisely the way that she wanted to. Her ceaseless searching for others like her was largely to no end, and so she rested her butch gaze upon herself, trying to imagine the world through that older butch's eyes. Directly following this euphoric moment of queer future-building, Jess is intruded upon by her parents and sent to a psychiatric ward, followed by charm school. She is punished for her deviance and forced to conform to a set of standards that seek to erase her existence. Her joyous butch gaze is put on hold to make space for imposing gendered structures.

Between her childhood suited adventure and her working-class factory butch adult life, teen Jess experienced the visibility she so desperately sought as a child. Upon pressing her co-worker for the name of a a bar she had mentioned, one in which "pansy" men and "mannish" women hang out, Jess made her way to Niagara Falls to see it (Feinberg 23). What she saw upon entering brought her to tears: "strong, burly women, wearing ties and suit coats. Their hair was slicked back in perfect DAs.[7] They were the handsomest women I'd ever seen. Some of them were wrapped in slow motion dances with women in tight dresses and high heels who touched them tenderly. Just watching them made me ache with need" (Feinberg 24). Her emotional reaction to seeing people who reflected both her gendered embodiment and her sexual desires is intense and rhetorically necessary in the context of the butch gaze. Viewing many butches at once after not seeing any but herself, Jess's eyes react first, releasing years of deprivation in that one moment of butch excess. Her body is next to react, aching with need. She has found community, likeness; she has found herself reflected back to her in the faces and bodies of the butches populating the bar. Without this community, she surely would have still been a butch and a mannish lesbian. But among community, she was cared for and found intergenerational bonds with the older butches that had lived entire deviant lives before she was born. Seeing those who, essentially, had *done this before her*, made space in the bar and in the world for Jess to exist in her queer body and her queer joy. They showed her how to be butch in the 1950s, and some of those butches eventually showed her different kinds of futures, futures in which not all butches are women.

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[7] A popular short haircut in the 1950s, short for a "ducktail" haircut (Medhurst, "The Lesbian History of Short Hair").

Decades and decades later, after Jess changed her body in a number of affirming ways and passed as a man for years, she confronts her reflection once more in a self-reflective moment.

> I stood up and looked in the bathroom mirror. The depth of sadness in my eyes frightened me. I lathered my morning beard stubble, scraped it clean with a razor, and splashed cold water on my face. The stubble still felt rough. As much as I loved my beard as part of my body, I felt trapped behind it. What I saw reflected in the mirror was not a man, but I couldn't recognize the he-she. My face no longer revealed the contrasts of my gender. I could see my passing self, but even I could no longer see the more complicated me beneath my surface (Feinberg 283-4).

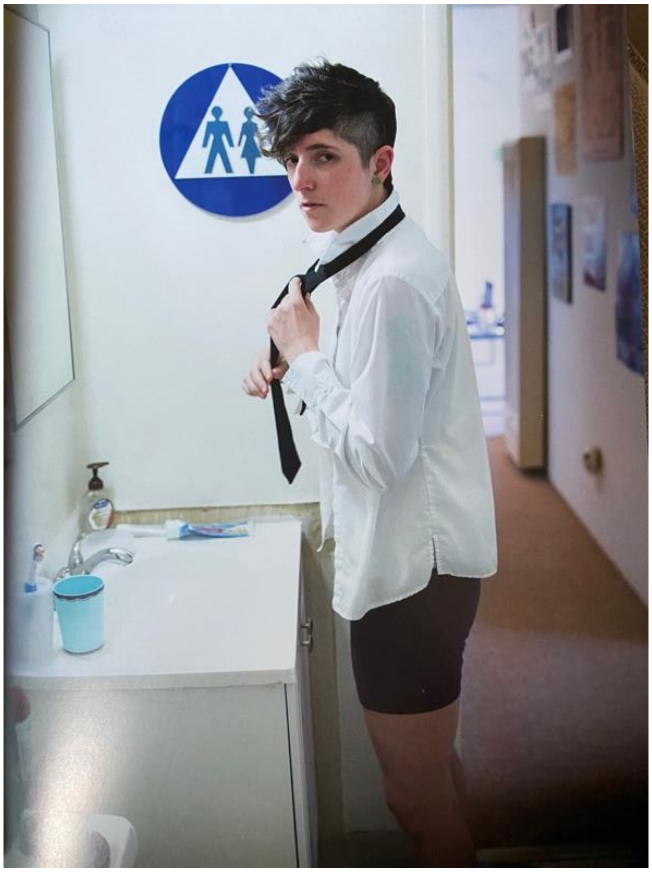
Her depth of sadness appears visible to herself when she can no longer see the nuances of her own self-invention but rather is subjected to viewing herself as a passing man through the eyes of others. And yet, in this same moment, she stares back into her past and remembers the non-conforming child she grew out of. Jess recalls: "I saw her standing in front of her own mirror, in her father's suit, asking me if I was the person she would grow up to become. Yes, I answered her. And I thought how brave she was to have begun this journey, to have withstood the towering judgments" (Feinberg 284). Although this moment was previously expanded upon to shed light on her complicated gaze, here, Feinberg returns in language and feeling to Jess's adolescent self, struggling to see a self that had never been represented before. These mirrors of past and present are fragmenting Jess's existence, rather than reflecting the straightforward sameness one might expect from a mirror.

After years of passing as male and simultaneously losing parts of herself to the harsh, "towering judgments" that accompanied that living, it is this moment in Jess's life that she decides to stop taking hormones, to return her face to its "softness" and reveal the "contrasts of her own gender" that she has since learned to admire (Feinberg 286). She has constructed pieces of a newly gendered body to worship, and she continues to build a future for herself that allows her to feel joy and peace in the mirror. She grapples with these feelings: "I didn't regret the decision to take hormones. I wouldn't have survived much longer without passing. And the surgery was a gift to myself, a coming home to my body… I wanted to be able to explain my life, how the world looked from behind my eyes" (Feinberg 287). Rejecting projected images of ugliness and otherness that she faced in the world, reconstructing narratives of pain and surgery, Jess begins a new life in a body she wants to love. She wants to gaze at herself and feel admiration, not a depth of sadness or well of loneliness. She wants to turn that gaze, then, outward, and explain her life from behind her own eyes. Like Meg Allen's self-portrait, she constructs how she wants to be seen, showing and hiding what is whole and imperfect to a desiring audience. From a 1928 narrative of wanting to maim a cruel body, of hating the reflected self and feeling anger toward a chest, maiming becomes a coming home to a body – a gift. Jess allows herself to feel at home in a body that she gives herself.

To bring maiming into this scene is not to universalize nor to judge Jess's surgical and hormonal choices as a butch. Rather, it is to illuminate that there are all kinds of ways to gaze upon oneself with these complicated feelings of contentment and contempt. Jess's contempt for her facial hair and the androgyny that was lost within it is combatted by the euphoria of her flat chest – and any combination of (including none of) these affirming choices may in fact bring joy and sorrow to each individual butch. Judith Butler's oft-cited theory of gender performativity helps to explain this butch phenomenon, this delicate balance between bodily autonomy and societal pressures imposed upon us. Gender identity as we understand it is a "performative accomplishment," achieved through a "stylized repetition of acts" that we all engage in to form these recognizable gendered embodiments (Butler, "Performative Acts…" 519). Further, Butler argues that this accomplishment is "compelled by social sanction and taboo" (519). Butler does not argue that gender is put on in the morning and taken off at night, potentially swapped for a new trendy gender identity each day. All that is to say that the twenty-first century butch surely wakes up in the morning and chooses which polo shirt to pair with their lace-up boots. But that same butch may also contemplate top surgery each time she looks in the mirror. Their personal embodiments deviate – misfire – from normative gendered expectations, with a whole world of "social sanction and taboo" working upon her before she even wakes up that morning. Through the refusal to repeat stylized and gendered acts, however, we see Jess subvert the whole concept of gender identity. For a length of time, she embodied maleness, and eventually decided it was not her desired path anymore. At any given moment, her butchness confuses and reconstructs what we would like to think of, what we are comfortable conceiving of as coherent gender identity. The joyful butch in fact is a normative gender's misfire; the butch smiling at hir own reflection has subverted that which is expected of hir (that expectation being, in fact, butch blues).

In the image that follows, taken from Meg Allen's series *BUTCH*, the subject combines Butler's theory of performativity with my theory of the butch gaze. Jenna, a thin white butch with a mohawk, gauges, and face piercings, stands half-dressed in front of a bathroom mirror.

We, the observer, or perhaps we, the butch-gazing photographer, appear to have caught them off guard. They glance over at their observer, at Meg Allen really, and make direct eye contact in the moment of the rehearsed practice of tying their tie. Their hands are in motion; this is not their first time tying a tie. Gazing away from the *mirror* present in the image, and rather into Allen's camera, they reveal a sort of expertise. They exhibit the same confident, stoic gaze that we saw in Allen's self-portrait, but Jenna's environmental portrait finds them in the masculine ritual of a (presumably, due to its bright lighting) morning routine. The not-yet-readiness of this image creates an intimate butch gaze, from Allen to Jenna to whomever their viewer might be.



"Jenna, 2014" by Meg Allen

The camera's butch gaze usefully obscures the gendered binary bathroom sign right behind Jenna's head. In my reading of this image, their hands, their gaze, and the sign are the most important butch aspects on display. A white triangle inside a blue circle, framing two generic figures which are colloquially read as male and female. What is the irony of this appearing in a butch's home bathroom? The ironies are truly endless, the least of which being the butch "bathroom problem" (of misrecognition and its dangers) that Jack Halberstam touches upon in his introduction to *Female Masculinity*, and many other queer and trans writers and theorists have elaborated on since. Public bathrooms aside, this butch resides in a private bathroom, their straight body (meaning physically, *not* heterosexually) juxtaposed with the unrealistically triangular "man" and "woman" protruding from their head. Their narrow butch body makes a gender binary look unnatural in its presence. They subvert this binary by appearing far more human outside of it.

Jenna and Meg Allen's mutual butch gazes compose the coherent gendered picture that appears on the still-glossy pages of my tattered copy of *BUTCH*. That gender identity is called into existence by the title of the series itself; it announces that all participants are, wholly or partly, butch. As do the performative utterances that constitute our gendered acts, the title *BUTCH* brings into existence that which it names. It creates a deliberate space – and takes up that space – in the world of portrait photography, for butches. While icons of the twentieth century butch literary canon title their works with Blues and Loneliness, Allen's 2017 *BUTCH* removes the emotion from their title and rather allows their camera, their images to tell the stories of butch gazing and butch subjectivity. *BUTCH* has no particular emotion attached to it. Rather, its capitalized ambiguity, its catachrestic categorization allows viewers to look into the lens of Allen's butch camera, see themselves in the images Allen produced, and perhaps through that photo-mirror see a different path for our collective queer futures.

Chapter 2: ***STRANGERS BY NAME, NOT BY NATURE[8]: Butch Recognition Across Space, Time, and Medium***

BUTCH ELDERS were not hard for Jess Goldberg to come by, when she finally found the right bars to frequent. But until that community was uncovered, she was lost and afraid in a world of misunderstanding. The protagonist of this chapter, one young Alison from author Alison Bechdel's 2005 family tragicomic *Fun Home,* comes of age soon after Jess, feeling deeply the weight of butch absence in her life. That is, she feels the absence once she experiences butch presence for the first time. Seeing her first butch was a charged moment of: "I don't know you but I *know* you," immediately interrupted by a parental authority demanding her attention away from deviance in a failed attempt to control her future path. Alison responds differently to these two intergenerational hails: one coming from male familial authority, and the other coming from unknowable butch presence. The intergenerational butch gaze that Bechdel places upon her young self in this graphic memoir, in part, shaped how a new generation, the one that grew up with *Fun Home* on the Broadway stage, views themselves and the intricacies of butch visibility.

For many butches, seeing oneself in the mirror in adolescence is the only butch visibility available. And often, those selves we see in the mirror are fragmented and distorted by the misrecognitions we encounter through a harsh public life. How much of the harshness we greet ourselves with is caused by the disconnect we face out in the world? Yet still sometimes, in rare and beautiful moments, we get to see other butches in the wild. In this chapter I am in part concerned with queer adolescence; to queer children, this queerness is somehow recognizable, and adults can be supportive or destructive figures in that process of queer self-building. In an instance of queer-viewing-queer, recognition often plays an important role in the gazing queer's concept of self.

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[8] Phoebe Adams, "Creases."

Though my primary literary grounding is in a childhood moment, this inquiry into recognition began for me when I spent the summer of my nineteenth year working at a hardware store. Over and over again, I was mistakenly hailed by a "sir" or "excuse me young man" or "hey man." Each time this happened, I experienced a particular kind of vulnerability tied to labor and public space. Though this job was surely not the first gender battleground on which I fought, and it was not the last, the anxieties of being subordinated as an hourly worker to the gendered positions I fall outside of had my brain churning day and night over the semiotics of butch recognition, as I hammered newly mixed paint cans shut with a polite, though masked, smile plastered on my face. And so, this chapter is a meditation on butch vulnerability: the discomfort that happens when hailed incorrectly and thrust into unknown gender territory, as well as the inverse of that, the joy of a knowing glance or prolonged queer eye contact with the knowledge that otherness is looking upon otherness.[9] Often as visible queers we are holding our breath in public, waiting for the next person to make a false assumption and humiliate us both. When a pre-teen compliments my haircut, or two moms come to the checkout counter, or a tall femme on the street gives me a smile that lasts too long to just be friendly, I can exhale for just a moment. As I discuss rings of keys and dirty words, I exhale, knowing that this recognition occurs within and outside of my presence, and that in all queer cases it is transformative.

Transformative moments of queer recognition can emerge between self and self, or in many other contexts of self and other (that is: other by name, not by nature). In his introduction to *Female Masculinity* (1998), Jack Halberstam presents his reader with the tools to construct a different kind of butch gaze – one from behind. He goes into a few pages' detail about Del Grace Volcano[10] and a number of photographs in his "Jack" series (Halberstam 36-38). Volcano photographed "Jack/Jackie," a masculine-of-center person, from behind in an androgynous sailor uniform, leaving his viewer unsure of the subject's gender. Next to the from-behind photograph comes the front, and so this would-be sailor is revealed to have breasts. Halberstam's analysis focuses on the androgyny that queer backs convey in this moment, and extends that further in most butch moments-from-behind. What may appear at first glance to be "male" is revealed "female," two imperfect terms that do not wholly or even partially capture the complexity of butch subjectivity. The images trace the elegance of a long, naked back followed by the simultaneous revealing of a masculine face and a feminine figure. For a butch viewer, this moment of turning around prompts that brief exhale. Butch subjectivity helps to complete that incomplete maleness/femaleness; the butch gazes upon the androgynous back, and in their catachrestic subjectivity, they may find community in the unknowability of that photograph.

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[9] This is not to generalize: for many butches, trans butches in particular, being called "sir" is not a misrecognition at all – but a proper address to their gendered being. For others, it is not so. There is no monolith butch story, yet each butch experiences their own kinds of misrecognitions in public – whether that be misrecognized as male, female, or, simply, *other*.

In other words, a butch viewer will respond to differently gendered cues than their more binary gendered counterparts. Butch gazing, from behind or the side or any other such unknowable angle, has the potential to create a butch-butch subject position on both sides, hailing the butch viewer in the subject position, positioned in mirrored opposition to the butch Subject of that gaze. This theory of the formation of subjects out of individuals in the context of a hailed subject-to-Subject comes from French philosopher Louis Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," first published in 1970. In this essay, Althusser works through his theories on how ideology is constructed and how individuals are made into subjects of ideology and both Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses through processes of hailing and interpellation. A formulation he states, in a few words, is as follows: "*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, by the functioning of the category of the subject" (Althusser 1356). He proceeds to elaborate on this process of hailing:

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[10] Queer and trans performance artist, drag king, and visual artist – in this case, Halberstam is discussing his photography.

> …ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!' Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed subject will turn round (1356).

In this scenario, Althusser lays out in clear and imaginable terms the formation of the subject and the transformation of the individual into subject through the hailed "Hey, you there!" Althusser argues that the hail hardly ever misses its mark, and by turning around, the subject knows that they are the correctly aimed subject of the call. The hailer recognizes whom they are calling for, and the person receiving it recognizes themself as the correctly addressed recipient of said hail. When Althusser parsed out the different subject positions in this scenario, he did so to articulate ideology and state/ideological power. In the context of this thesis, I borrow Althusser's subject/Subject construction to frame butch gazing in the case of young Alison, in a luncheonette, seeing a butch in public for the first time as a child in *Fun Home*. Repressive ideologies functioning as arms of the state are operating in Althusser's police hailing scenario, but the butch-gazing-butch, in their own cross-generational world, exist momentarily outside of cis-heteronormative ideology, subjected only to each other.

The butch cannot be traditionally interpellated by an Althusserian hail because every moment she is in public she is choosing to engage or not engage with misrecognitions. Hailed by "excuse me sir" by cis-het passers-by, the butch has that moment – the moment in which the subject of the state has no choice but to turn around – to recognize their outsider status, recognize the recognition of their masculinity, weigh the physical stakes of turning around, consider the responses they could give, and all in that moment, choose to turn around or not. Subjected to power differently than that elusive male subject of state power that Althusser refers to, the butch hailed by misrecognition has the power to ignore, or to disrupt. The hailer recognizes the butch as one thing, one singularly gendered being, and may be unsettled by the multiplicity revealed when the butch turns round.

Further, the butch inverts interpellation by hailing unsuspecting queers in public. The butch is visible and therefore recognized by other queers. Or, in Althusserian terms, he summarizes what he calls the "duplicate mirror-structure of ideology," or the mutual and simultaneous recognition in the interpellation scenario, as the following series of simultaneous truths:

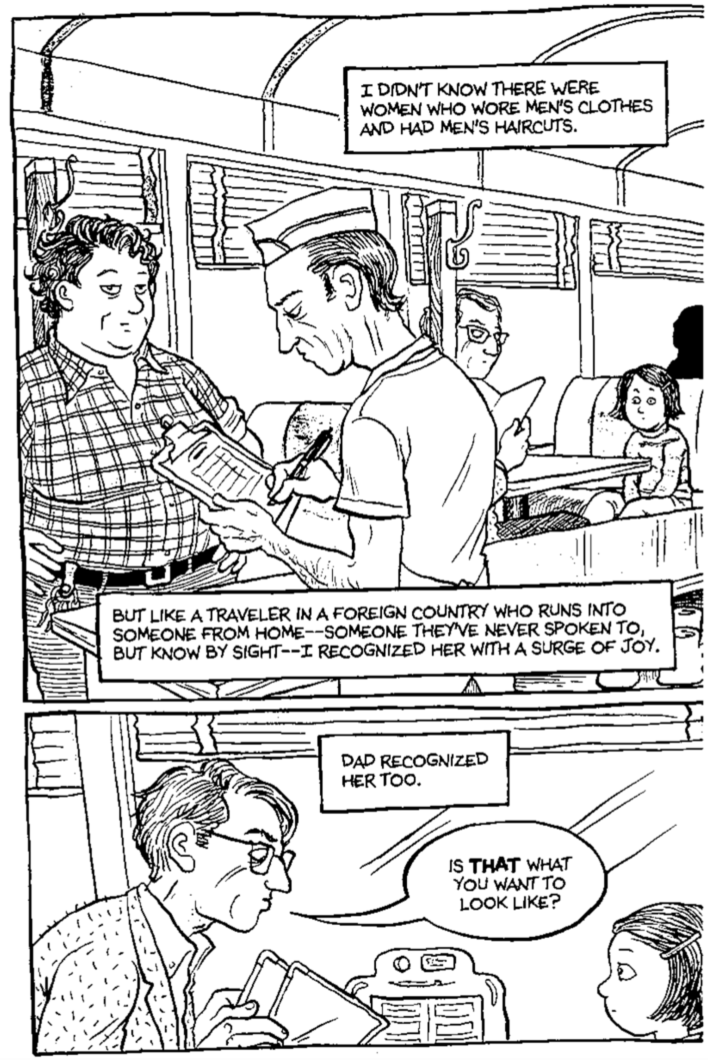
> 1. the interpellation of individuals as 'subjects'; 2. their subjection to the Subject; 3. the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally the subject's recognition of himself; 4. the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right … *'So be it'* (Althusser 1359).

The largest takeaway from Althusser's self-summary in this discussion is the "mutual recognition" of the subjects that sparks the subject (the one subjected to state power, not the one extending the arm of it) to recognize his own self. From there, the conditions of the world are as such and their interactions set the precedent for future Subject-subject encounters. In this summary, butches both follow the structure of recognition and therefore subject formation, and they queer it. One butch views another, is struck by her physical presence, there is a mutual recognition or a recognition of the self in the other, and thus everything is really so – the world is truly as we, butches, perceive it. What is different here is that the hailing butch need not open her mouth and shout to hail; her presence rather announces itself and she may not even perceive the gazing butch. The subject's recognition of self in Subject, in this case, is divorced from the institutions of power that Althusser presents us with because it is deviant-viewing-deviant, two (or more) bad subjects in the eye of the law.

To provide a most concrete example, the famed "Ring of Keys" moment in Bechdel's graphic novel and later song from the *Fun Home* musical exhibits this one-way hail that goes unnoticed by the butch hailer. Alison, the queer child of a mentally ill and queer father, has various moments throughout her childhood of failed girlhood, in which her father attempts to correct that girlhood. He urges her to wear dresses, to fall in line with her gender as he has always failed to do. Alison is drawn to masculinity instead, admiring it, imitating it. Any given moment in this graphic memoir provides a meaningful look into queer youth and the development of butch identity (such as her being nicknamed "butch" by male cousins, her family trip to the West Village late in the summer of 1969, her and a friend trying on her father's suits, her devouring of lesbian novel after lesbian novel as an undergraduate, and so on). But the moment that has stuck in the minds of countless queers since the graphic novel was published in 2005, and more so since the 2014 musical adaptation of it, is the moment in which Alison sees what appears to have been her first butch.

In a Philadelphia luncheonette with her father in the mid-1960s, Alison's attention is captured by the "old school butch" who walks through the door. In the text of the graphic novel, Bechdel writes: "I didn't know there were women who wore men's clothes and had men's haircuts" (118). She is first captivated by the butch's hair and clothes. As readers, we see the drawn images of the scene unfold: a mesmerized Alison staring at the profile of a short-haired butch delivery person donning a ring of keys, giving her an air of importance, and we see

Alison's father recognizing her as queer, and thus as temptation for his already-deviant daughter. Before we hear from her father, Bechdel breaks into the narration once more: "…like a traveler in a foreign country who runs into someone from home – someone they've never spoken to but know by sight – I recognized her with a surge of joy" (118).[11] In the musical, adapted by Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori, this moment is one in which Alison leaps from the table and breaks into song. In the text, Bechdel tells us that her father recognized this butch at the same time as her, but without her queer joy. The musical takes this break in images, a break in which Bechdel uses one page to illustrate a large frame of Alison watching the butch, the butch front and center, followed by a smaller frame below it in which Alison and her father are back in focus.


I DIDN'T KNOW THERE WERE WOMEN WHO WORE MEN'S CLOTHES AND HAD MEN'S HAIRCUTS.
BUT LIKE A TRAVELER IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY WHO RUNS INTO SOMEONE FROM HOME--SOMEONE THEY'VE NEVER SPOKEN TO, BUT KNOW BY SIGHT--I RECOGNIZED HER WITH A SURGE OF JOY.
DAD RECOGNIZED HER TOO.
IS THAT WHAT YOU WANT TO LOOK LIKE?

What happens in that moment of queer joy, given only a single sentence of text, is expanded thoroughly in the musical adaptation in the song "Ring of Keys." Quoted at length below, the lyrics of this song are significant in what is and is not present. It is full of ellipses and feelings of incompleteness in young Alison's self; she has a searching feeling of: I *know* what I'm looking at, but I do not know why. The song, beginning with an older narrator Alison speaking, reads:

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[11] Alison Bechdel has actually since commented that she never saw any lesbians with key rings growing up in small-town Pennsylvania, but rather she only saw them later on in life living in a big city, which prompted her to start flagging with her own key ring (Caterucci "Lesbians and Key Rings…").

> ALISON [Spoken]: / You didn't notice her at first but / I saw her the moment she walked in / She was a delivery woman / She came in with a hand cart full of packages, / She was an old school butch. / SMALL ALISON: / Someone just came in the door. / Like no one I ever saw before. / I feel... / I feel... / I don't know where you came from. / I wish I did / I feel so dumb. / I feel... / Your swagger and your bearing / and the just right clothes you're wearing / Your short hair and your dungarees / And your lace up boots. / And your keys oh / Your ring of keys. / I thought it was s'pposed to be wrong / But you seem okay with being strong / I want...to... / You're so... / It's probably conceited to say, / But I think we're alike in a certain way / I...um... […chorus…]/ Do you feel my heart saying hi? / In this whole luncheonette / Why am I the only one who see you're beautiful? / [Spoken] No, I mean/ [Sung] Handsome! […] I know you / I know you / I know you (Tesori and Kron).

Lyricists Jeanine Tesori and Lisa Kron adapted Alison's original moment, one that acknowledged the key ring only in its illustration and not in its text. The original text and original drawing in this graphic novel depiction of queer adolescence give its adapters a wide breadth of material to mainstream a queer object of fascination: the key ring. The rich queer history of signaling through the key ring confirmed in this singular image that not only was this a masculine woman, but that she was a butch.[12] Alison's long description of her, detailing short hair, dungarees, lace up boots, swagger, and most of all her ring of keys show what has hailed her in this moment. For Alison, the butch holds all of the power in this interaction. Although her father intercepts her joy and instructs her indirectly that this butch is doing her gender wrong, the ring of keys has already unlocked all of the doors it needed to in her mind. The butch's keys jingle, and Alison's heart says hi, sees her handsomeness, sees inherent value in this butch.

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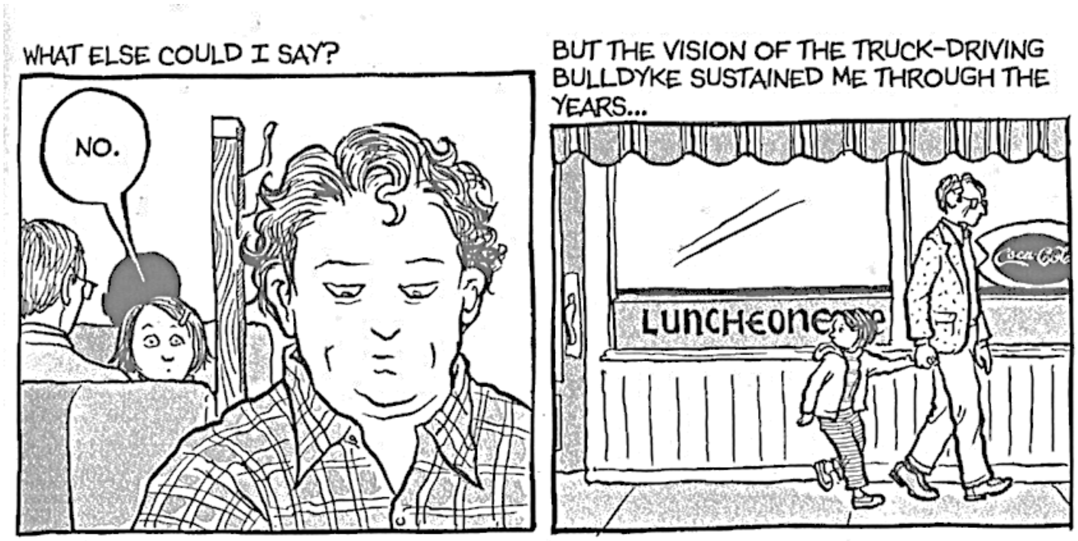
[12] Key rings have been a signaling mechanism for decades: "The style stems from the history of butch women being attracted to the masculine aesthetic of blue-collar jobs, and being shunted into such jobs because they didn't fit the gender molds of the other career tracks—stewardess, waitress, secretary—available to women in generations past" (Caterucci "Lesbians and Key Rings…").

Hailed not by her father's interruption but by the butch's key's announcing of themselves, Alison is interpellated and drawn into queer structures, into a queer world of butch worship.

While her father attempts to reel her into femininity, policing young Alison's gender at every turn, the historical queer signifier of a key ring is what she chooses to turn around to in that moment. She *wants* the butch to feel her presence, to understand their connection. Without a word between them they share an entire history. Though ideology functions around interpellation and systems of Repressive power, butch interpellation can function outside of that strict definition, creating all kinds of different subject positions with varying levels of agency. The butch subject of the butch, engaging in an already subversive gaze, chooses again and again to see herself as real in another's eyes. This object, the ring of keys, captured Alison's attention and "sustained [her] through the years" (Bechdel 119). How does this inanimate object call out to her and demand her adherence to its history, now making it their shared history and shared present? In the graphic novel, there is no mention of the keys but a small depiction of them hanging from the butch's belt loop. Tesori and Kron blow this small symbol up into a fixation on Alison's part, the piece that represents the wholeness of queerness and butchness – not just abject femininity – in the delivery woman who enters the scene.

The ring of keys act as a mirror for Alison, a way for her to look into her future. Just as she recognizes this butch with a surge of joy, enamored by her men's haircut and men's clothes, by her confidence to really *be* in public, the joy is disrupted by her father's own repression, paranoia, gay panic, resentment – call it what you will – bubbling to the surface. While Alison "recognized her with a surge of joy," her "Dad recognized her too" (Bechdel 118). Staring down his nose at his hopeful daughter, his speech bubble reads, "is **that** what you want to look like?" With no other choice, she lies: "no" (Bechdel 119).


WHAT ELSE COULD I SAY?
NO.
BUT THE VISION OF THE TRUCK-DRIVING BULLDYKE SUSTAINED ME THROUGH THE YEARS...
LUNCHEONE
Coca-Co

His attempt to force femininity onto her fails because she has just witnessed the successful product of failed femininity, and as the song tells us, she is beautiful – no, handsome. The keys have acted as that tiny bit of confirmation to young Alison. Yes, this is a most unusual woman. Yes, she has short hair, men’s clothes, and a certain swagger to her. And yes, the keys whisper to Alison, and to her audience, she is a big ol’ dyke – a “truck-driving bulldyke.” Seeing a butch in action allows for a not-yet-butch to see a future possibility, giving Alison a mirror into herself as an adult. Recalling momentarily *Stone Butch Blues,* Jess was a confused queer child who had no frame of reference for what she might look like in the future. Alison’s luncheonette encounter in the late 1960s that has been turned into a cultural icon in the queer collective imagination gives butches-in-the-making that image of a real butch out in public, a gender deviant just going about their day delivering packages. As Jess searches in the mirror for an image of a woman she might grow up to become, Alison stares into the broad hips holding the key ring, the woman she so desperately hopes she is brave enough to become.

Alison’s imagination of her future self was transformed by her butch interpellation, and Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori’s lyricism transformed a silent textual moment into an outpouring burst of emotion. While the older butch acts as a mirror for the gazing butch, Bechdel’s illustrations work in conjunction with her text to transform this queer moment into the convoluted hailing moment that it becomes. The visuals of the butch are just as important as the words describing her. As the butch peeks into Bechdel's frame, she writes, "In the city, in a luncheonette… we saw a most unsettling sight" (117). The following page is the large frame of Alison viewing the butch, the page in which the break in frames opens the rhetorical space of the "Ring of Keys" song performance. The form of the graphic novel makes it so successfully transferable to a musical because of all that is laid out visually, but also because of all that is unsaid. The butch need not appear onstage in *Fun Home: The Musical* for her presence to be felt; rather, the audience is left to imagine her. In both iterations of this moment, different pieces of butch interpellation are highlighted. In the text itself, her visual presence is as striking as the words on the page. In the musical, Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori focus their sights on the key ring, turning the song and that image-break moment into a love letter to butch signaling. This multidimensional approach to queer storytelling gains meaning in each subsequent form: the text elaborates on the images, and the performance elaborates on them both. The particularities of the image-text relationship turn this small moment into one worthy of butch icon status.

This transformative pairing of image and text is, if course, not a unique form to the graphic memoir/novel, nor is the multidisciplinary possibility of it limited to performance. Informal magazines and journals like zines and newsletters have long been a queer tradition, one that has carried on today in the age of social media and digital photography. While the graphic novel and the non-graphic novel as well as the musical persist as queer literary forms, the expansive field of queer writing is made more widely available through digital platforms. One such example is queer media platform and magazine started in 2016, *Butch Is Not a Dirty Word*. Butch photographer Esther Godoy leads this ongoing project of butch "identity, visibility, and voice" ("Our Mission," *Butch Is Not A Dirty Word*). Each edition of the *BINADW* magazine combines images and text to create a mosaic of butch experiences. Some butches write poems, some personal essays, some informal and brief accounts of their lives. There is no hierarchy of what sort of writing is valued in this magazine. Side by side, these writings are placed next to varying kinds of butch portraits. Godoy herself takes many of these portraits, and otherwise uses social media to seek out other queer photographers. Within these publications, the images of butches are presented as equally important, equally urgent as their writings. *BINADW* takes the queer practice of meshing image with text and publicizes it hugely, to a potential audience of anyone with internet access.

Editions of *BINADW* combine, as the website states, visibility and voice. For young twenty-first century butches seeking representations of future selves, this magazine not only provides images but stories of butch lives from butch perspectives. Far from the subtle ring of keys signaling from the late twentieth century, *BINADW* is an overt act of queer visibility. Its name, *Butch Is Not a Dirty Word*, helps create what it names: by saying that it is not a dirty word, it not only evokes a history of it being a dirty word, but it in turn corrects that history in the present, forcing it to cease being a dirty word through photography and prose.

Many butches featured in these imprints talk about their own ring of keys moments, as well as their relationships to texts like *Fun Home* and *Stone Butch Blues*.[13] And yet for many other butches, literature is not an integral part of their butch development, but for all, knowing and recognizing other butches out in the world is. These imprints over and over again provide images of diverse and nuanced ways that butches live, look, and take up space. They talk about their own moments of misrecognition and the dangers they face in public, and they talk about the beauty and empowerment of queer butch recognition.

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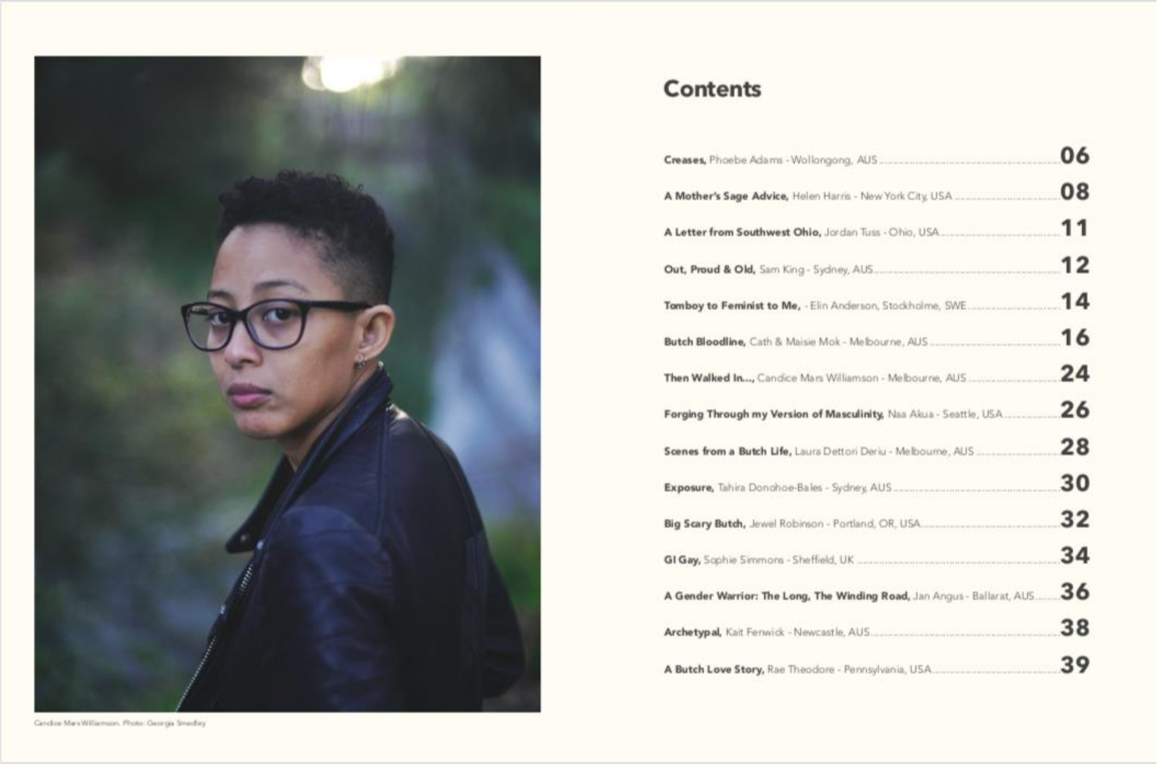
[13] For example, in their 7th edition, "the butch4butch edition," a butch-butch couple both unknowingly gift each other vintage copies of Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* for an anniversary.



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Candice Mars Williamson. Photo: Georgia Smedley

Butch Is Not a Dirty Word: the intergenerational issue, pp. 4-5

The third issue, "the intergenerational issue," published in 2018, features a number of butches discussing and reminiscing on their own visible journeys, as well as the butches who paved the way for them. The table of contents is pictured above, to show what the magazine physically looks like, as well as the ways that butch gazes visually accompany the text throughout. Though a whole project could be dedicated to the colloquial writings of these butches paired with their images, I will provide only a brief anecdote excerpted from one of the featured butches in this issue to demonstrate the scope and style of these writings, as well as the queer relationships that they forge between image and text.

The first butch featured in this issue is essayist Phoebe Adams, with her short personal essay, “Creases.” She writes about learning to iron her shirts from her grandmother, reading *Fun Home* for the first time, and attending a “Butch/Stud” event as an adult. I choose her essay to focus on because she was so deeply impacted by *Fun Home*, bringing Alison’s ring of keys moment into her own life story. After quoting the text of the scene from the graphic memoir, she writes, “I feel thrilled by the opportunity to be that ‘stranger from home’ for other lesbians … I felt that being in a ‘foreign country’ every day since I embraced being butch. I’d seen travelers like me in passing. I’d even scanned crowds for other butches. I was a stranger to my own homeland, quietly lonely in a community nearly devoid of women like me” (6). Adams talks about that doubly challenging feeling of knowing she is the visibility that might save another butch, and yet hardly encountering any other butches along the way. She takes Bechdel’s words, “like a traveler in a foreign country who runs into someone from home,” and expands them into her own experiences of inhabiting the world as a butch (Bechdel 118). She is thrilled to be recognized, and yet isolated in the foreign cis-heteronormative world. Moments like these that delve into the concept of *being* recognized, not just *recognizing*, provide a necessary perspective to Alison’s ring of keys moment. In this sense, part of *BINADW*’s work is to approach the “old school butch” in Alison’s Philadelphia luncheonette and ask her, how do you feel in the world?

BINADW, most of all, values holding space for butch community. The various forms that the publication takes allows for different modes of togetherness for butches, be they online, one-on-one, or in large, celebratory gatherings. In this same essay, Adams talks about attending a “Butch/Stud” event for the first time, an Australian event organized for butches and studs to share their experiences and get to know each other in both social and professional contexts. Within that entirely butch context, Adams reflects: “My butchness wasn’t such a paradox then,

"BEING BUTCH IS THE BEST THING THAT'S EVER HAPPENED TO ME. ONCE I LET IT IN, THAT POTENT FORCE, I FELT MYSELF HEALING."

Phoebe Adams for Butch Is Not a Dirty Word

I didn't need to be protected in that room… In the warm buzz of conversation and laughter…, in the easy way I was allowed to move through it, I knew that I'd finally found the place I'd been homesick for" (6). Her feelings of home, of placeness, of belonging are completely new, and yet what she had been unknowingly searching for her entire life. Much like Alison's ring of keys moment, which Adams is particularly conscious of, she enters a room full of butches and can exhale, knowing that these people understand her on a level deeper than anyone who occupies the traditional familial space, "home." The magazine's ultimate performative utterance that butch is *not* a dirty word comes to life yet again in that butch space. In the mere presence of that many butches, it can no longer *be* a dirty word. Adams's homesickness for this place immediately upon entering asserts the transformative nature of butch togetherness. Her confident gaze, staring into the camera, and the openness of her stance create a self-assured butch who can exist because of her butch ancestors.

Butch togetherness, in the imprint, also takes the form of butch words joined with butch images. The seriousness of these *BINADW* portraits is often matched by the depth of self-reflection in their complimentary butch writings. Bold, defiant gazes that challenge their viewers to make eye contact, to look butchness in the eye and recognize it as whole, hail the *BINADW* viewing subjects into subjects of the butch gaze, and thus engage in a cross-medium butch gaze (much like that which occurs with Meg Allen and other butch photographers' work). We are just barely allowed the access to gaze at Phoebe Adams, and earlier at Candace Mars Williamson who appears adjacent to the table of contents.

This gaze that challenges, that looks back at its onlooker, diverges from Alison's ring of keys butch who was peripherally – if even at all – aware of her onlooker, not turning to meet her innocent stare. In "the intergenerational issue" of *BINADW* in particular, the butch-meeting-butch gaze is significant because it opens up the magazine to a world of intergenerational eye contact. In *Fun Home*, the butch gaze went in one direction: toward the older butch. In *BINADW*, butches are allowed to gaze upon older and younger butches at the same time, placing themselves generationally within them. Butch-butch photography thus pushes forth this intergenerational butch project of mutual understanding that young Alison dreamed of as she hummed "Ring of Keys" across the booth from her father.

CONCLUSION: ***Looking Ahead***

This thesis thus far has argued that there is a particular way in which butches experience the world, and that this set of experiences shapes the way that they perceive the world, how they *gaze*. A young Alison Bechdel, at a loss for words, finds herself drawn to a working-class butch, and in doing so, gives lyrics to that indescribable feeling of likeness. Butch gazing is precisely that feeling: a wandering through the world seeking familiarity, only to find otherness. Butches are constantly surveying and perceiving the worlds around them, but it is not until other butches (or representations of them) are present that the butch gaze becomes engaged. When Laura Mulvey first theorized the male gaze, she pinned down the subjugation to objecthood that women were given onscreen. When Jack Halberstam extended that subject-object position to images of butch-femme desire being identifiable to cis-heterosexual-male viewers, he opened up a space for queer subjects and queer viewers. My intervention takes the butch photographic gaze outside of the image and demands of its viewer: how does it feel to take in this image while living as a butch? The image-text-observer relationship is thoroughly *butched*. Further, these butch-viewing-butch relationships often cross generations, creating intergenerational bonds through images, texts, and individuals.

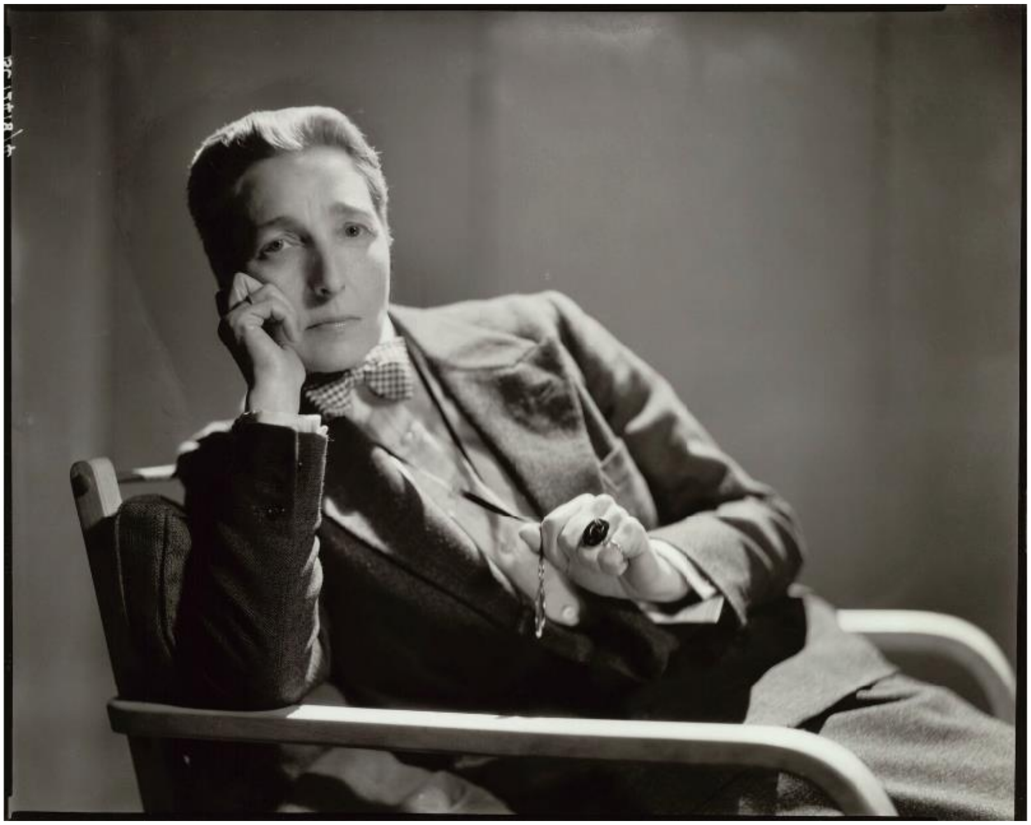
The first chapter took into consideration the mirror as a literary object and a photographic prop. Dissecting transformative moments of self-observation in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, alongside images of these butch authors, I raised the mirror as an object of butch inquiry. I explored what it hides as well as what it reveals as a repeated butch literary object. Ultimately, I rest on the mirror as one that can reflect our challenging pasts and help us see clearly into queer futures. Photographically, the butch artist Meg Allen's self-portrait begins this discussion, and their image presents viewers with a mirror, tattoos, and a covered-yet-bare chest. The ambiguous butch back is something that Jack Halberstam has written about, but the ambiguity of the covered butch chest is touched upon briefly in this chapter to shed some insight into butch bodies and privacy. Allen's self-portrait has them facing away from the backgrounded mirror, which reframes butch mirrored gazing in the twenty-first century. Butch-viewing-butch-self in the mirror is a profoundly private relationship that these artists have allowed the rest of us to glimpse through their work, and the nuances of butch gazing uncover pieces of that butch mystery.

The second chapter examined butch-butch recognition in public, using the now iconic "Ring of Keys" moment from Alison Bechdel's 2005 graphic memoir and subsequent Broadway show, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. Young Alison recognizes a butch in public – someone she knows deeply but does not know by name, drawing butch connections across queer generations. This chapter also raised the question of medium, unpacking the relationship the graphic novel form draws between image and text. Through image and text, (mis)recognition reveals pieces of how butch-in-public understanding operates. Butch recognition of butch evades the strict categorization of dominant discourses, opening itself to a different rhetorical space of being and becoming. Using Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation, I argue that the older butch and her key ring subversively hail the younger butch into the subject position that creates a lifelong butch gaze. Like young Alison, without the need for words, we see and make meaning of one another. I end this chapter with the contemporary independent butch publication *Butch Is Not a Dirty Word*, a magazine that uses portrait photography and personal writings in conjunction to make space in the world for butch voices and images. The magazine speaks to the importance of cross-generational butch gazing, and the impact that butches of different worlds and ages coming together has on the inner lives of young, impressionable, could-be butches.

In this conclusion, I return to *The Well of Loneliness*'s Radclyffe Hall's stylized portraiture to further explore its butch legacy. Hall's lasting portraits were taken for personal usage – to send to lovers – and for publicity purposes. The combination of intimate and public images of butchness is captured perfectly by the form of the portrait, but butch portraits shot by butch photographers afford subjects new opportunities for agency – agency that was not available to Hall in her time. Additionally, this conclusion works to draw together the butch gaze and the different modes of butch stylization. A highly visual mode of being, butches see and are seen and therefore influence the public lives of other butches. In three-piece suits or work pants, butches are infinitely visible. And, further, their gazes and presentations of self go on to shape future butch generations.

In the wake of *The Well of Loneliness*'s censorship in England, Hall had a portrait taken to mark the publication of her forthcoming book, *The Master of the House,* in 1932. "Self-styled 'Photographer of Men'" Howard Coster took this portrait ("Howard Coster: Camera Portraits of the Twenties and Thirties"). Coster advertised himself initially as such and went on to take hundreds of portraits of men of art and letters. He was a photographer to the stars, so to speak, during the 1920s and 30s, and largely in Britain. Hall is grouped with the "women writers" and other notable women he photographed throughout his career. But from a butch perspective, this note of "Photographer of Men" is not to be overlooked. In fashion and photography scholar Katrina Rolley's master's thesis, "The Lesbian Dandy: The Role of Dress and Appearance in the Construction of Lesbian Identities, Britain 1918-39," she describes Coster's work: "Coster apparently found the trappings and demands of femininity antithetical to his chosen photographic style, and when he opened his studio in 1926 he proclaimed: 'My studio in Essex Street has been opened for the purpose of making portraits of men exclusively' (Pepper 1985, p.vii)" (135).

Rolley goes on to reveal that he photographed a number of lesbians beyond Hall, not all of whom were masculine. Coster's gaze frames his subjects – Hall in particular, as butch – as male subjects, as it was men he captured most. Thus, under his gaze, a certain kind of masculinity was revealed. It was a closed off masculinity, that which is apparent in Hall's portrait. Coster and Hall shared an attraction to the visuality of masculinity: Coster capturing men in film and Hall emulating them in dress. With the preexisting portraits of men in mind, Hall's own sensibility was captured as uniquely butch in this portrait.



Butch misrecognition in portrait photography, out of context, can work to elevate status, unlike the dangerous butch mis/recognition that happens out in public. The potential visibility given to butchness by this portrait publicized a butch gaze much under-represented at the time. Butches could gaze privately at Hall's image in the newspaper, announcing her novel's criminal trial and her deviant lifestyle. Hall's queerness was public and scandalized, but without her literary history, her portrait (among Coster's portfolio) may simply read as another portrait of a man. And, going by John for most of her life and maintaining the masculine invert identity that she did, Hall may well have been a man under different circumstances. Her butch gaze faces outward into an unclear future, much like her rhetoric at the end of *The Well of Loneliness*.

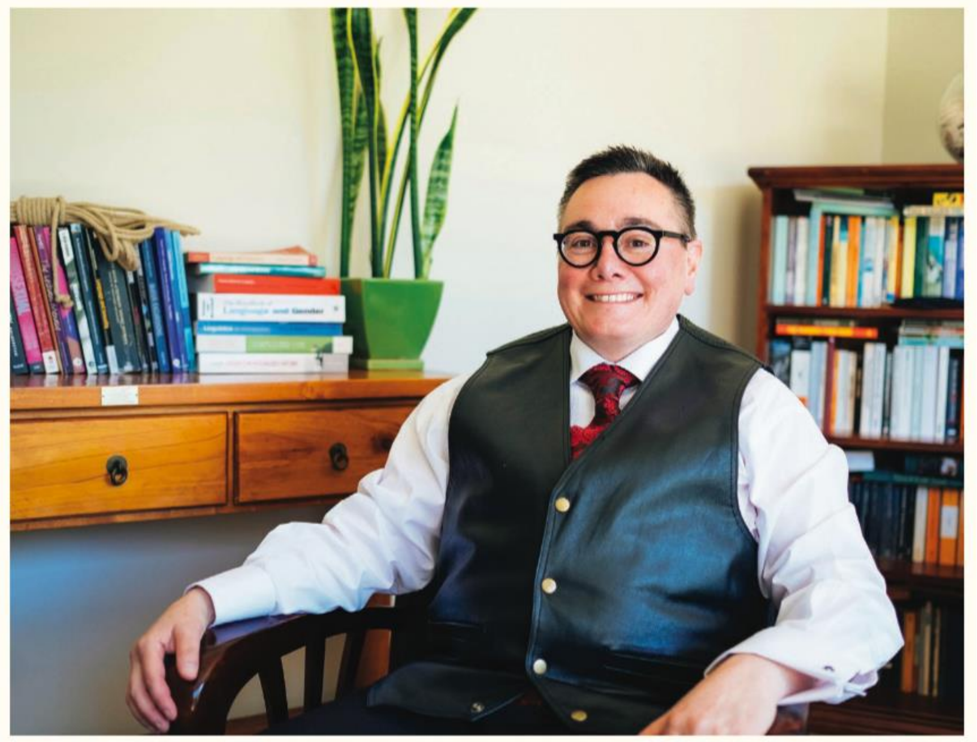
Her soft gaze, inviting her onlooker's eye contact, while maintaining an air of status through her stature and her ornamentality: none of these attributes are highlighted for their femininity, nor is she attempting to look like a "woman" in any normative way. The words that *The Well of Loneliness*'s Stephen lacked, like butch or masculine-of-center or non-binary or trans or any other such word that may have helped fill her well of loneliness, are all working to shape the butch sensibility in Hall's portrait. Her legacy has been as that of a woman writer, a lesbian writer, but the particularities of her physicality place her squarely outside of simply woman, lesbian, rather into the catachrestic *butch*. At the same time, her intensive seriousness is captivating to a contemporary viewer. It is an old-school seriousness, a seriousness that is so sure of itself and its worth. Her severity succeeds in the context of photographs of great men: she is not immediately read as woman nor man, and she is thus elevated to maleness in that moment of confusion.

At the same time, her masculinity is a highly ornate. Her stance stoic and her suit well-pressed, she is adorned by numerus objects. Her checkered bowtie, large gemstone ring, and dangling monocle surely create an image of wealth and status. But the ornaments themselves portray a dandy's masculinity, or, a campy one. Butchness and camp, Jack Halberstam argues vehemently, do not belong in the same sentence. He goes so far as to create a new word for drag king performances ("kinging") so that they can exist outside of a camp aesthetic world. For Halberstam, Butch is serious, it is authentic, it is in and of itself actual. Camp is artifice, often feminine, it is a mockery of gender. He claims that making masculinity the target of camp is difficult because "masculinity tends to manifest as non-performative… accordingly, femme may well be a location for camp, but butch is not" (238). I use this portrait to pose back to Halberstam: why not butch camp? Hall's masculinity in part is that authentic and non-performative presentation, but at the same time, her ornamentality and her overperformed seriousness paint her as a dandy. In other words, Halberstam's sweeping claim of butch≠camp fails when it comes to the (butch) dandy. In "Notes on Camp," Susan Sontag argues (among many, many definitions) that "camp is the answer to the problem: how to be a dandy in the age of mass culture" (Sontag 288). The dandy, she explains, was the connoisseur of taste, of quality, of high men's fashion – and of course, often queer (for example, Oscar Wilde). In the age of mass culture, as she says, the dandy cannot exist in all his seriousness. And thus the camp sensibility is born in all its ornateness. As Halberstam claims, in a Wildean sense, the opposite of camp may well be "earnest" (239). Halberstam argues that camp is not the location for butchness because camp is inherently tied to femininity, while the butch is actively untying herself from femininity every moment. But, in Halberstam's discussion of camp and drag kings, he does not take the dandy into account as the site of overperformed masculinity in its earnestness. Upper class, overdressed masculinity that follows all of high society's rules is not exclusively available to the cisgender queer man. Hall, in her upper-class deviance, mimics in many ways the dandy of the decades predating her.

Rolley's "The Lesbian Dandy" notes that the dandy and the lesbian do in fact share a good amount of visual history. She makes the highly unusual claim that lesbian and dandy may in fact be interchangeable textually. In doing so, she shows her reader that their histories are quite visually aligned, and their embodiments of marginalized masculinities mirror each other. Quoting Ellen Moore's 1960 book on dandies, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm*, Rolley chooses to replace "dandy" with "lesbian." Rolley, though in actuality Moore, writes, with "lesbian" in place of the original "dandy": "The lesbian's achievement is simply to be herself. In her terms ... this phrase does not mean to relax, to sprawl, or ... to unbutton; it means to tighten, to control, to attain perfection in all the accessories of life, to resist whatever may be suitable for the heterosexual woman but is improper for the lesbian." (152-3). While true perhaps of the 1920s-1930s not-quite-butch lesbian in Rolley's terms, the dandy in the twenty-first century maps most directly onto the highly ornamental butch dyke. With the workings of the butch gaze in mind, Rolley's quotation may be further que(e)ried: "the [*butch's*] achievement is simply to be herself." In a harsh world of heterosexual gazes, the butch gaze blazes through and offers a self-defining mode of being. Butch dandyism is particularly lesbian as Rolley argues, but it is further entangled with gazing and the ways in which butches occupy space, in public and in photographs. The butch dandy is a genuine expression of masculinity. Honoring the intricacies of the dandy's adornments in her imitation, the butch dandy is a highly organized achievement of masculinity.

And thus, many of Sontag's definitions seem to directly oppose butchness: camp is feminine or androgyne, butch is masculine, camp is artifice, Halberstam's butch is earnest. Hall's butch dandy is antithetical to many aspects of camp in Sontag's view. But her theorizing of the camp *sensibility* aligns itself with the ineffable definitions of *butch* I proposed in my Introduction. Sontag claims, "to talk about Camp is … to betray it" (Sontag, "Notes on Camp," 275). It is so difficult to pin down that to attempt to do so is to betray its catachrestic quality. At the beginning of this thesis, and at the beginning of many queer texts discussing butch themes, there is an earnest attempt to define butchness in not necessarily a singular or stable way, but in an indisputable and real way. And yet, each butch with hir own lived experiences of butchness can pick up each one of these different texts and disagree with entire sweeping claims. I found truth and value in Jack Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* at times, and at other times felt utterly isolated from the butch world he described. The disputability of what is or is not butch is not a subject of this inquiry, but the malleability of butchness as a category of embodiment and the ways that its indescribability mirror the camp sensibility's are of import. Sontag claims that to be a dandy in the age of mass culture is to embody camp; I claim that to be a dandy in the age of mass culture is to be butch. Butch sensibility and style surely evolve just as camp has. But in both cases, the love for the banal – the abject, the out of style – persists (Sontag 285).

Butch intergenerational inheritance of style is based in authenticity and love, and yet these styles often end up mirroring older aesthetics that align closely to camp styles. The following portrait from *Butch Is Not a Dirty Word*'s third issue, the aforementioned intergenerational issue, features a graying, smiling butch in a buttoned leather vest over a highly buttoned crisp shirt and an ornate red-and-black tie. Laura Dettori Deriu, in their accompanying short personal essay, reflects on "scenes from a butch life." Looking back on a life lived butch is a luxury many did not have, and yet still a luxury many of us hope to have. This is quite a long way off from Radclyffe Hall's portrait plastered in British newspapers alarming the public of her deviant novel. Her image became tied to her work because of its queerness, the queerness that her image and her text revealed together. In our contemporary world of reclaimed gay words (like queer, dyke, butch, etc.), butch images accompanying butch texts meaningfully queer each other in an intentional way. In the case of *BINADW*, image and text interact on nearly every page. If you're not seeing the writer of a particular butch piece on its accompanying page, you're seeing another, related butch nearby. The creators of this imprint are astutely aware of the butch necessity to have image and text speak together. In doing so, butch voices are put on the same pedestal as butch images. Does Radclyffe Hall's butch gaze peer far enough into the future to envision Deriu's butchness? Whether or not this intergenerational gaze occurs on Hall's part – seeing the future – her butch stylization appearing alongside her widespread lesbian text puts a butch gaze into the press, one that preceded and yet mirrors works like *BINADW* and *BUTCH*.



Laura Dettori Deriu. Photo: Nix J Stephens

Deriu's old-school butchness is far more playful than Hall's stiffness. Sitting in a buttoned leather vest, arms relaxed on the chair, smiling with teeth, their butch comfort and joy are highly visible. In stylized portraits, these butches sit content in their ambiguity. While Hall evokes wealth and intellect with her sharp suit, ornate ring, bowtie, and monocle, Deriu's surroundings speak louder than their own presence. Surrounded by books, Deriu appears joyous and calm, their books adorned by a rope (presumably signaling kink) and their appearance elevated by their round glasses and ornate black and red tie. Both butches are exhibiting a campy ornamental masculinity that is self-aware in its decoration. Between these photos, taken in 1932 and 2018, butch style has remained dapper, producing models of new style dandies – perhaps, leather dandies – for the generations to come. The highly decorated, tuxedo-clad butch of the early twentieth century has in fact not gone anywhere. He just swapped his monocle for a better prescription and published his book without an obscenity trial.

At the same time, as we saw in *Fun Home*, the visible "old school butch" is not always flagging in a three-piece suit. Alison's experience of the everyday, working-class butch as instantaneously recognizable sheds a different light on butch aesthetics. The butch dandy in all her campy glory is not the lived reality for most butches day-to-day. The realities of living in the world as a gender-non-conforming person without the wealth and status of Radclyffe Hall and other high-society butches puts a lot more at stake in gender presentation. The butch dandy's gaze is no greater, no more significant than the working-class butches. In the end, both are getting glares on the street from cis passersby. Their returned gaze is equally butch, even when their social statuses may diverge.

These same working-class butches are unseen by history, or rarely seen, because their portraits were not disseminated in newspapers, their stories unwritten and unpublished. Projects like the 1993 collection of oral histories, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*, which told the stories of forty-five working-class lesbians living in Buffalo, NY from the 1930s-1960s, do the difficult work of collecting and disseminating the untold histories of butches with little means and little power under patriarchy. This community is the one lightly fictionalized in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, and the community that ze grew up and worked in. Feinberg's photographic legacy, as mentioned in Chapter 1, exists on hir website, and consists of many, many pictures ze took on digital cameras throughout the last decade or so of hir life. Hir gaze was less interested in capturing hirself than the world around hir. Hir more communal form of gazing is aligned with hir class consciousness and political leanings, those being proudly communist. Feinberg fought and wrote at the intersections of class, gender, and sexuality, hir lifelong work making the general argument that, “historically, the development of class divisions is at the root of same-sex oppression” (Feinberg, “Many histories converged…”). Collectivity in hir leftist politics does not align itself with the materialism of the upper-class dandy, but hir butchness was as authentic, as historically significant as (if not more than) theirs.

The more humble, less ornate butch decorates hirself with just the objects ze needs to survive the world: jackets, boots, keys (or, tools of safety, comfort, and labor). And yet, these butches are just as visible as the bowtie clad, monocle-touting high-society butch who travels the world and showers her femme in gifts, the butch who has the ability to commission a portrait of herself resembling history’s great men. *Fun Home*, the musical and the graphic memoir both, showed audiences that rings of keys are a meaningful flagging mechanism, one that makes space for queer futures by harkening its viewers back to a queer past. Although “Ring of Keys,” the song and its meaning, are not in any way a failed seriousness – in fact, many reviews have praised the success of this fixation in this small moment, stating that it succeeds at humorizing lesbian history without mocking it – there is a campy element to the proliferation of the flagging boom that *Fun Home* helped to publicize. The exaggerated possibilities of the key ring/carabiner and other such modes of lesbian flagging have a camp potential, when done so absurdly in their seriousness. Without having to be well-versed in butch-femme aesthetics and working-class lesbian history, younger generations of dykes can move into the world with jingling carabiners, laughing at the jokes surrounding them. Practicality and ornament meet in butch camp, and it has been the butch gazes of the artists of our pasts who have created that utterly recognizable lightness and humor among our butch selves.

Butches surely gaze at the world in unique ways, historically contingent ways, queer community-seeking ways. It is when a butch sees another like her, however, that butchness becomes real in her mind and a possibility in her future. Butchness as a sensibility has that ineffable quality that camp has: the moment you seem to put your finger on it, it runs in a completely new direction that reframes and obscures it all. Butches used to be for femmes alone, and now butches may love each other openly. Butches have never just been women, but in the age of technology and information, some can transition in life-saving ways that were previously impossible. TERFs want us to disappear, and so did many second-wave feminists. They wanted to believe that butches reproduce hegemonic masculinity, imitating maleness to engage in a false heterosexuality. Or, that all butches are ultimately always women. But the butch escapes each time, larger, louder, and dandier than before.

So, I leave you with the following final consideration: if a butch gaze can shape an encounter and change a life for the queerer, then what about a butch voice? A butch touch? What other senses and sensibilities, aside from the *gaze*, are uniquely butch? Listen to a butch, smell a butch, feel a butch…

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