CUSP

MK YOUNG

FEMALE MASCULINITY, LESBIANISM, AND LIVING BETWEEN
THANKS: Mom and Dad, my Engineering college in Boston, my four butch dads, Bay State Butches, Good Fellas, and all butches, fem/mes, dykes, funcles, and trans-masc everywhere.
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cusp noun

A point of transition between two different states: TURNING POINT also: EDGE, VERGE.

funcle noun

A portmanteau of female and uncle, meant as a nod towards old school newspaper terms like “female husband” when discussing masculine females.

trans butch noun

A lesbian who walks the tightrope between Butch and trans man.
MY BEGINNING

I was born between.
Between white mother, Chinese father.
Between constellations, Gemini and Cancer.
Between day and night.

Mom, Dad, and baby me.
it is agony to not have the language and framework to describe what you are feeling. it is even more painful when you have been taught your whole life that feeling this way—loving women and being a woman—is sinful and incorrect.

i was 12 when i first wondered if i was a lesbian. the thought made my eyes burn and my cheeks heat up as i cried in the shower. after all, what could be worse than being a lesbian?

i argued with my self as i washed my hair. i could not be a lesbian. just because i don’t like boys doesn’t mean i like girls. and be sides, when i was five i told my best friend that i would marry him. a lesbian wouldn’t do that...

it’s okay, younger self. it will be okay. in six more years you will still cry about being a lesbian, but this time it is with pride, not fear. this time it is because you have history and community, and you are finally feeling seen.
my first true foray into the internet and the freedom it offered was on a neon green petsite located at chickensmoothie.com. it had forums with topics spanning from in-game trading to roleplaying to lgbt stuff. that was my introduction to being okay with myself, the lgbtq+ thread on chicken smoothie. they used the split attraction model and the gender bread man when i first found it. for all i know they still do. that vaguely radical queer space pushed me into the closet of asexuality to hide my homosexual nature. it was not a good place for me to initially come out, i don’t think... but it’s where i first began to explore, and that means it’s important to where i came from and where i am now and how i got here.
At 14, I found solace in the rather complicated and mostly useless label asexual bi-demi-quoiromantic.

That meant that I didn’t feel sexual attraction to anyone but I had the capability to be romantically attracted to women and men but only after forging an intense emotional bond with them and even then I couldn’t tell the difference between platonic and romantic attraction. And then I said that my bi-attraction was towards women and nonbinary people.

All of which was just a very painful way of me trying to avoid calling myself a man-hating flannel-wearing homosexual lesbian dyke.

But being a child on the internet which is full of people telling you how “normal” barely-teenagers feel is hard at best and traumatizing at worst, so asexual bi-demi-quoiromantic it was.
three months out, lonely and looking for community.
high school gay straight alliance.
first time going, seven other people, talk about asexual and straight pride flags. no pronouns asked. just conversation in a classroom with eight students and the one out teacher on campus.
my first little community.
QUESTIONING, PART THREE

Maybe I am a lesbian.
The first time I went to pride was the day I turned 17. I had never been around so many LGBT people at once. It was summer in South Florida, so it was extremely hot and humid, but I had never felt lighter. I was walking around in shorts and a binder and a pride flag. I felt like I was on top of the world, part of something bigger than me, at home and safe if just for a few hours.

Me at Wilton Manors’ Pride, June 17 2017.
As a senior in high school, I put two months of preparation into a county-wide GSA summit as a co-president of the GSA. The most important thing I did that day was speak on a panel of LGBT people of color and name myself as a butch. In one session a girl asked what that butch meant. I’m sad that some of those people didn’t know what butch was, but I’m glad that I could show them. I hope, more than anything else, that some baby dyke out there saw me and started to see a path home.
A friend helps tie a rainbow bandana onto my arm at the Winter GSA Summit.
Facebook isn’t super popular among my generation but it has been the best way for me to talk to butches and mascs who live far away from me. Fashion groups, writing groups, diy groups, groups just to talk about feelings in a butch only environment.

The first group I joined is still active. It’s just a fun little space to hang out if you’re masc, born female, and attracted to women.

It seems kind of silly to me that I hold these groups as so important to me, but they really are gems. They’ve been a great resource to me to see butches in all stages in life.
Senior Prom, May 2018.
With one month until my departure to college, my parents took our family on a trip to Alaska. We made a stop in Victoria on the way back, and took the little tugboats from one side of the river to the other. We popped into a bookstore before we left, and I bee-lined for the Women’s and LGBT section. I found Ivan Coyote, Roxanne Gay, Alison Bechdel, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Trailed my fingers along the spines, carefully tugged down *Tomboy Survival Guide* by transgender butch author Ivan.

I sat down in the nearest chair, tuning the noise and movement of the store out until I registered a butch in that tiny Women’s and LGBT section. I think she noticed me (my young, obviously baby dyke self) watching her, and she turned to me. Commented on the book I had cradled in my hands, that she really likes Ivan Coyote, and how good that book is, and have I read it yet? Oh get it get it get it! She asked me for my literary recommendations, and we shared our favorite butch authors.
I pointed her to *Fun Home* and praised *Stone Butch Blues*, though Leslie’s most famous book was absent from the shelf. Maybe ten minutes passed before she had to go, said her wife was getting hungry and so was she. I thanked her. We traded names as we shook hands, Carol and MK.
Books have always been a safe haven for me. At five I loved *The Magic Treehouse* series, six and seven *Nancy Drew* and *The Hardy Boys*. *Percy Jackson*, *Harry Potter*, *Warriors* and *Guardians of Ga’Hoole* followed. They were my happy places. When I began to question my sexuality and realize my attraction to girls, I tried to find books that would show me my future; what life might be like, how I could be as an adult. Though my favorite stories always spun fantastic tales, there was never anything so magical as a happy gay person (let alone a happy butch). The words that had once embraced me now shoved me away and kicked me to the curb.

I floundered. I saw no future for myself, and it is hard to find a will to live when you cannot see your future. I persisted, survived. I googled and asked friends for suggestions. I read classics like *The Price of Salt* and *Annie on My Mind*. I find myself in *Stone Butch Blues*, in *S/he*. I make my own space with them. In time, in part with these books to guide me, I start to find my way. I thrive.
COLLEGE

Finally, finally, I have room to grow.
Description

Welcome to BAY STATE BUTCHES! A meetup-style group for all those "evil butch, tomboy, stud, bulldagger, masc-of-center, dyke types" centralized in the Boston area. We've always been around and always will be, might as well stick together.

Nothing kicks dysphoria and lesbian loneliness in the ass like hanging out with 20 butches at a women's center.
M.

She makes the world brighter and warmer. You could talk to her all day. You DO talk to her all day. She makes you grin until your entire face hurts. You have never known anything gentler than her love for you. She loves you so much you could cry. She loves you so much you DO cry. You write letters and songs and poems. She loves them all, though they are mediocre at best. It’s hard to love you, you think, but she never complains and always does her best. You think you could spend your life with her. It is a new and amazing thing for your partner to love your masculinity.
WHERE I AM

I've noticed myself talking about how I conceptualize myself by saying 'and now I'm here', but here does not say much of anything about what that means. It doesn't even scratch the surface of me. I'm a transgenderish butch dyke. My family calls me she, my butch calls me she, and my friends call me she or he. I don't use they pronouns any more because I am not some middle ground or a third, other option: I'm a masculine female. I don't call myself AFAB any more. I wasn't assigned female, it's the state of my body. The only women's clothes I wear are Tomboyx brand boxers and occasionally my socks, but I'm pretty sure staring strangers don't care about the gender of my underclothes. I will never touch a chest binder again and I can't even remember the last time I wore a bra. I'm comfortable like this. I have two feet firm in the ground. I recognize my people, masculine lesbians past present and future. My journey is not over, but I have a map and friends to help and be helped by along the way.
CALL ME (CONTACT INFO)

MK is reachable by email at butchtranscusp@gmail.com. S/he lives in the Greater Boston area with a fem rabbit named Patches studying engineering.

Yes, the title of this chapter is a Tegan and Sara joke.