

ONE STEP BEYOND

by Lynnell S. Long

Women born Women only ... (?)



I first read the statement "Women born Women only" on a flyer from Mountain Moving Coffeehouse, it was at the bottom in very fine print. I immediately knew it was meant to discriminate against the transgendered community.

I visited Mountain Moving Coffeehouse and, as I expected, no one rushed to throw me out; and there wasn't a group of angry dykes waiting outside to assault me, a fellow dyke, after the show. I was not harmed, I believe, because I am capable of 'passing' as a woman; I cannot be detected as a transsexual. But what about those transsexuals that are not?

There are some transsexuals who can pass as women, and

some who cannot, and then there are those that don't try to pass. This latter group feels that society should respect their decision to be themselves. They intentionally try not to "fit in." Should these transsexuals be discriminated against because of their decision? NO.

A transsexual's fight for self-acceptance starts at birth. Our fight is difficult because most transsexuals, including myself, believe that we were born female, with a physical deformity. The existence of this deformity caused us to be pronounced male at birth.

Women that are born without these deformities, I believe,

have it easier. No one tells genetic women that they are not female. Unless you were a tomboy, no one even noticed you, you—genetic girls—were just another girl. You were just another "being" separated from other "beings" by gender. Everyone knows that girls have vaginas and boys have penises. Your world was already created for you, all you had to do was exist.

It wasn't that easy for me or a lot of other transsexuals. I had to go against everything I was taught to find self-acceptance. There was no safety in being me. Believe me, if I was a guy and felt comfortable being a guy, then that is exactly what I would be right now. Instead, I was born a female, with a physical deformity. I knew it, and I was determined to be the woman I was and am, despite the things which everyone said.

So what is a Woman born Woman? It's someone who truly believes that she's female, whether she is a genetic

female, or a female with a deformity. No one has the right to say who's female and who's not. If that was the case, then what are butch lesbians? I mean what is the butch lesbian who walks, talks, dresses, and acts like what society says a man should walk, talk, dress, and act like. Is she just a gender bender, or is she really transgendered? Not unless she says she is.

It's funny how few people question butch lesbians. While gender norms are broken, because most butch lesbians are genetic women, they are not discriminated against as much as transsexuals. But transsexuals who are out, or transsexuals who may not be 'passable' are discriminated against, and this discrimination is put in writing.

This reminds me of the time I went to Unabridged Bookstore to buy *Body Alchemy, transsexual portraits* by Loren Cameron. I went to the shelf titled transgendered, but couldn't find the book. I then asked the where the book could be found. She took me to the lesbian bookcase. I asked her why the book was put on the lesbian "bookcase" instead of the transgendered "shelf," and her answer was that the book would not sell in the trans section. I told the clerk that I'm sure Loren Cameron would appreciate "HIS" book being on the transgendered shelf. When I left, the book of someone who identifies as a man remained in the lesbian section.

Women born Women only... Who's to judge? Who's to say who's a woman and who's not? Who died and made YOU boss? I know that for myself, being female is more than just the possession of a vagina and breasts. It's a comfort and peace within myself. It's self love that goes down to my soul and spirit; it's my essence.

Lynnell S. Long is a Chicago writer currently composing a book of poetry and writing her autobiography, as well as an activist on transgendered issues. Send e-mail messages: [redacted] and we'll forward them, or write [redacted]

The Butch Mystique

by Dale [redacted]

To butch or not to butch... The question of self-definition and identity remains a tricky one for lesbian women. Perhaps even more so, the very idea of the Black lesbian inspires a moment of pause, of reflection, of dissembling on the part of Blacks generally. Not only the Black "mainstream," but Black lesbians ourselves are still only just beginning to create a usable identity from a chaos of mostly negative images. Until fairly recently, our choices of role models have been extremely limited. Remember *The Well of Loneliness*? Banned at its 1928 publication because of its scandalous depiction of queer life among the British gentry, it was nevertheless an underground success and became an archetype of the lesbian dance for decades. Its author, Radclyffe Hall, became lesbianism's second cult heroine, after Sappho; all those consonants in her name seemed deliciously sexy and she was divinely butch—cropped



hair, fedoras, suits, ties, and those burning looks. Now, of course, the story of Hall's Stephen [redacted] seems more like the first fictionalized account of a transsexual—what with its medical descriptions of transgenderism—than a blueprint for the butch lesbian wannabe.

In any case, the *butch* persona is more than skin deep, more than mere style. Although style can certainly contribute to or even enhance empowerment; in the 1960s, when Blacks began to spell our name with a capital "B" and return the oppressor's stare, respect and fear followed, but that was also the culmination of centuries of political struggle. For butch lesbians, the question is equally complex. To begin with, nothing women do is taken

lightly in our culture, so the freedom to simultaneously exhibit self-awareness, issue a challenge, and enjoy self-parody is jealously hoarded by white men. It is no accident that, as lesbians, we have avoided both the stunning tragedies described in the film documentary, *Paris Is Burning*, and the public perception that our concerns sometimes constitute "art." Annie Lennox was camp, but Me'Shell Ndegeocello is *intense*; and neither is as much fun as The Village People.

As an African-American lesbian, I have found that there is an expectation of strength and virility about Black lesbians from non-Black ones. We are just supposed to have that certain something. While I admit that I am partial to ties, I am also not averse to the prudent application of a little Flori Roberts foundation or mascara. No matter. The actual competence and self-sufficiency of Black women goes back centuries, of course, to the equal opportunity labor of slavery, although if we don't know by now that virility and

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UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

WITH DANYEL [REDACTED]
by Lynnell S. Long

"I'm a woman inside out, and however you see me, or however you want to accept me, you do that for you, whatever makes you comfortable. But I am a woman, I accept myself as a woman, [and] if you can't accept that, then that's something you have to deal with. My definition of life is to go after your dreams, to live your dreams. The reality of life is to have dreams, and a lot of times our dreams won't come true, but the thing is to keep going after it. I think everything in life started out with a dream somewhere," says Danyel [REDACTED].

Danyel [REDACTED], a 32-year-old female illusionist/transsexual, came out at Ameritech Jan. 2 as a transsexual.

"It was scary. I walked in and no one knew who I was at first. When it clicked, everyone was shocked. The second day people started asking questions like—What bathroom do I use? Do I have a boyfriend? How do I have sex? I looked at them and asked them how would they feel if I asked them the same questions," she said.

"Once things calmed down it's been back to normal," she added. "I have my own group I hang out with, [those who] respect me and accept who I am. Whether I'm in jeans and a baseball cap hanging out with the boys, or whether I'm in an evening gown walking across the stage. ... I'm going to be Danyel, I'm still going to be a woman.

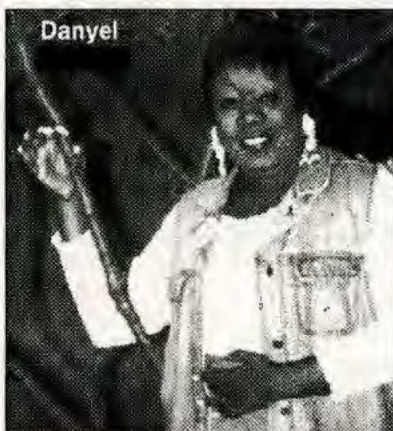
"I never considered myself gay, because from [childhood] I had that feeling of being a girl, I didn't know what was going on. But because society considered me being gay, I just caught on to that label. But as I grew older and understood what was going, on I erased the gay title and accepted the fact that I am a woman [who] was born with birth defects that could be corrected.

"As far back as I can remember I always related [to] being a little girl, wanting my hair combed and braided, and wanting to dress up and be pretty. ... In High School I tried out for the cheerleader squad and was told I couldn't be on the squad, but I fought it and won. I was a cheerleader all through High School. ... I never related with the male side, the only thing I related with that was the fact that I have a penis," says Danyel.

In 1992, Danyel tested positive for HIV: "My last doctor visit was a wake-up call for me, to really look at the fact that I am HIV positive. I went there and my T-Cells had dropped ... my doctor asked what am I going to do and I said it's time to get busy. At first I was in this deep denial, I have it but I don't have to accept it. Now I've learned to accept it and live with it and go ahead and do what I need to do for me. Life is short—whether you're HIV positive or not, you never know when you're going to go, so I do everything I can do now. At first I was scared to let people know, won-

dering what people might think of me, now I don't care. There's nothing to be scared of, to me it's like having cancer or [diabetes]—as long as you take care of yourself and keep a good mental attitude everything will be OK."

Danyel, a recovering alcoholic, sponsors an HIV-support group at BE-HIV (Better Existence with HIV) in Evanston every Friday. Danyel also owns her own entertainment company, Entourage Entertainment, at (773) 880-1307.



"I love the field of entertainment. ... We tell people the reality of the business. The talent is out there but there is no one to push them and get them out there. I think I have that spirit, because someone had to push me," said Danyel. "I love myself today, it took me a long time to do that. ... When things happen, if I

have problems, I face them head on and deal with it. ... I finally realized ... that our problems really aren't as big as we, our minds, make our problems. Once we sit down and meditate and do what's right, we find out that [our] problems really [aren't] a problem, that we have an answer to it."

Besides her other projects, Danyel is also preparing for her own talk show on cable, *Heart and Soul of Chicago*.

Next Month: 1996 Miss Black America and Comedian, Flame Monroe.

UP ON IT

Music reviews by J.

Erykah Badu — Baduizm
(Kedar Entertainment/
Universal Records)

If you've missed all the hype on this "jazz, hip-hop soulstress," you must live in a cage. Executive produced by Kedar Massenberg (D'Angelo's former manager), Erykah Badu is the designated "next big thing." The good news is that the accolades are not completely unwarranted. All songs on *Baduizm* were written by the ambitious, Dallas native (except her unnecessary cover of "Touch A 4 Leaf Clover"), featuring jazzy, soul with heavy bass and drum lines. Her voice (characteristic of Billie Holiday, though she insists it is

unintentional), reverberates on top, making this an above average release. The marketing of her neo-bohemian image (army surplus gear, afrocentric prints, high heel gym shoes, incense) is a bit overdone, but with groovy tunes like "Next Lifetime," "The Otherside Of The Game" (about her drug dealing man, featuring The Roots), and "Drama" (dedicated to Phyllis Hyman with bass by Ron Carter), it's hard to complain. You probably already own this.

Morcheeba — Who Can You Trust? (China Records/
Discovery Records)

From the first chord of the first track ("Moog Island"), this English trio creates a smooth, mellow (and dare I say "trippy") release which encompasses and invites introspection. Sit down

with a heavy problem and put this on slow drip. Worries slip away as delicate, dreamy vocals by Skye Edwards echo over sleepy soundscapes. Perhaps that is a bit overstated. But before you know it, it's over. Don't get me wrong, *Trust* is hypnotizing, not boring. In fact, with melodies like "Trigger Hippy" and "Never An Easy Way," Morcheeba sounds so pleasant, it's a shame to call them trip hop. However, with lines like "Tears run down my face/as you spray me with your mace/thank you" it's far from a "happy" album. If you're still on the fence, try this experiment: From Sade, to Sweetback, to Morcheeba.

Rahsaan Patterson —
Rahsaan Patterson (MCA)
This debut, mostly co-written by Patterson and producer, Jamey Jaz (with whom he co-wrote two of the better songs on Tevin

Campbell's *Back To The World*), is impressively coherent. Initial exposure to the first single "Stop By" recalls the retro soul sound many artists are (annoyingly) imitating. However, instead of relying solely on '70s melodies we already know, Patterson succeeds where artists like Eric Benet fall short, by crafting a release full of choice original melodies, strings, and crisp instrumentation. Essentially, a collection of love (as opposed to sex) songs, there's not an unlistenable one in the bunch. Highlights include "My Sweetheart," "Spend The Night," "Stay Awhile," and the fantastically romantic, "Can We Wait A Minute." Patterson's voice is not very distinctive, but you'll remember his songs. Buy it for your honey.

Question: Is it just me, or is Toni Braxton trying too hard?

BLACK LINES

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Women Making History



Welcome to the Women's History Month Edition of **BLACKLINES**, which includes interviews with Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun (above left) and U.S. Rep. Sabrina Sojourner (right), the nation's first openly lesbian U.S. Representative. Also inside, a preview of the annual Women in the Director's Chair Fest March 20-23, including *Conjure Women*, by filmmaker Demetria Royals (left).

Braun photo at last year's pride parade by Yvonne [redacted]
Sabrina Sojourner photo by Rink [redacted]

ALSO INSIDE: Black church leaders join lesbigays for March 7 forum; Chicago's Rustin Awards; Coming out as transgendered at Ameritech; Adodi comes to Chicago; What it means to be butch.

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