

Transcript for: Casey Miles, Butch Rhetoric: Queer Masculinity in Rhetoric & Composition
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[Miles speaking] I start with an explanation
I'm using the performativity of publication
And the performativity of gender
in a performance of butch rhetoric

with this video I'm embracing the visible nature of butch
you see butch and you know what she is
with these words I am acknowledging you, the audience
the ideas of butch that you bring to this space
situating butch in your life
and acknowledging the privileging of the immediately visible
undermining what you think
An academic publication
A video
A grad student
A woman
A butch
Should be

So I start with a description
What is butch?
So often a way of being seen, but also a way of seeing
A gaze
A landing place
An arrival at a hard fought destination
An identity
A name I claim with all my might
Feminist and butch
Queer and butch
Lesbian and butch
Scholar and butch
Writer and butch
Crisscrossing overlapping intersecting digesting living breathing feeling fucking butch
an embodied explanation for playground crushing, boys-clothes wearing, penny loafer
scratching,
slowly
Blossoming
Flower
Yes, a way of seeing, you see
A way of being
A way of knowing

I resist the notion of butch as a hybrid identity of man and woman
Butch is not caught in the fictitious web between the two, but proposes a view of
masculinity in the soft curves of a female body
It isn't that Butch resists description
But floats hard to pin down with mere words
A shape begins to form but at once shifts infinitely into infinity
Another stop along the way to an endless destination
pouring blood and sweat and milk and cum and tears
yes dear, a butch
that vision at the end of the double take
those hips those tits
your mind is having a fit
holy shit
It is not an It,
It is a woman.
Which now begs the question
Does butch belong to the female body?
Does butch belong to woman?
I dither here, unsure of which identity to decree or decry
What comes first?
The woman or the butch?
The feminist or the queer?
None of these mean that much to me without the other
And I believe close to wholeheartedly that this shit matters
That I can be a cog in the old clunking along university machine
And still make an actual difference in the actual lives of actual people
Cause why else are we here?

Butch is...
Stoic and tender
Sensitive and tragic
Flawed and fucked
Hard soft pudgy skinny fat
ridden and riding
Top bottom switch sideways tribade
Any way every way
Sinners and winners
Silicone wieners
Cowboys and tomboys
Leather dykes and leather daddies
Mothers and fuckers
sisters and brothers
Butch is exactly what you think it is
And butch is nothing that you ever expected.

The problem with defining is that a definition sticks

A definition that sticks is then stable,
however brief
however temporary
however constructed
A thing with a capital T
With stuff with capital S's
that pull to extremes – this OR that, here OR there
Therefore I need to insist on room in this description for resistance
For movement
For everything that gets left out that remains lost and unknowable
Like butch as raced and classed
To know butch we must also know stud, aggressive, macha, genderqueer, masculine of
center, and two spirit

Butch is also described by its relations
To men
To transmen
And to femmes
With men it's how we are different
How we are the same
How butches just want to be men
And the people who love and fuck butches just wish we were men
In relation to transmen
How butches are just pre-op transmen
How transmen are just post-op butches

And In relation to femmes
Our genderfucking companions in history, eternally and fatally
Femme hyphen butch joined in struggle and solidarity
Daring to love and fuck in a world that jailed, shamed, and murdered people that loved and
fucked as femmes and butches
From this we are left with a conversation about the value and privilege of visibility and
invisibility
And we owe it to the lives and legacies of our femme and butch elders to have this
conversation
And let their audacity not stand for nothing
Bar culture, leather dykes, bull daggers, lipstick and lace, "three articles of clothing
appropriate to one's gender"
That dimly lit dingy dyke bar where femmes and butches exchanged stories and
tongues while cleaning each other's wounds
Is a part of me
The me speaking to you asking to be worthy of learning from
All together now
Huddled under the umbrella slash field slash discipline slash some other metaphor for
describing a collection of folks interested in the same thing
Where butch is a seldom uttered word

You see, butch is rhetoric at work
A process of becoming
Of persuasion written on the body

one thing that pulls us all together is our belief in the power of writing
Writing ourselves to understand our communities
Families
religions
governments
identities
writing ourselves into existence
while writing ourselves extinct
Writing to see ourselves
Writing to see ourselves seen

I write butch with my collection of neckties
freshly ironed shirts, blue jeans and boots
The mess of hair product on my head
And aluminum free deodorant in my hairy armpits
Decisions I've strung together to tell you I'm butch
I write butch with this video
Carefully chosen moving images
Strung together to tell you part of a story
And these words I speak to you now
Strung together to complete a performance of butch for an academic audience

Having already waded the waters of self-loathing and shame
Butch enters quiet
unassuming in the periphery
you see her eventually
she sees you seeing her
she's been watching the space
and she's been listening
patient
going about her business
expecting the confusion and boundary guarding
quite comfortable navigating the stares
the sneers
the whispers
the side glances down upturned disgusted flared-nostril noses

Butch comes from the deepest part of me
As how I understand myself
As how I understand the world
A way of being seen
A way of seeing

I can tell you that this feels dangerous
Dangerous because butch rattles the hold men have on masculinity
A grip so tight it has choked us into oppositional divisions
Patriarchy, capitalism and war all depend on these partitions
Dangerous because I'm putting a foundational understanding of my Self out and up for
scrutiny
But I get this cause I live this
On my body
In seeing being seen

I add this performance to a lineage of work on butch
Leslie Fienberg
Joan Nestle
Chrystos
Gayle Rubin
Shane Phelan
Jack Halberstam
I'm walking through the door in Rhet/Comp opened by Michelle Gibson, Deb Meem, and
Martha Marinara back in 2000
And I'm standing here now, visible and present
Authentic as right now ever can be
Finding ways to show you butch

We are fortunate to be here, to be gathered in this time
Speaking queer
Writing queer into existence here
Thank you for watching
Thank you for listening
Thank you for seeing me.....see you seeing me

I implore you to know the names of those who've linked their work to such a concept as
"queer"
Who are asking to be paid for it
And insisting that we can offer this field something new.

CREDITS

A video by Casey Miles

Music
"strung n left 2 hang"
by greyguy

"Mystro Soul Instrument"

by Mystro

“Baby”
by cdk

“Urban Hero”
By Rockit Dogg

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