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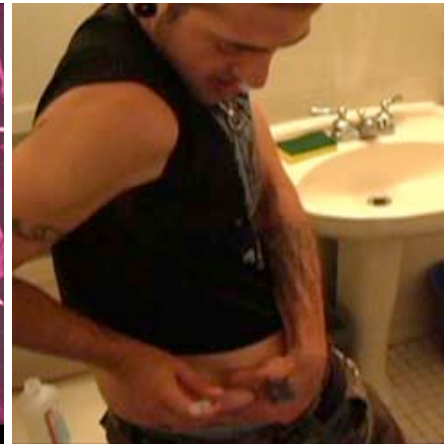
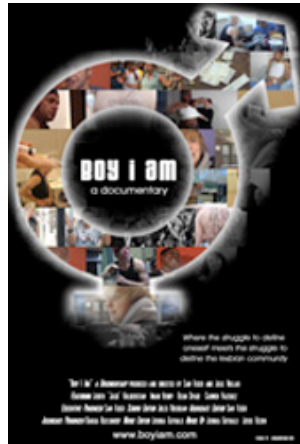
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Finding the Femme Withinby [Malinda Lo](#), June 23, 2006

Transgender activism has had a major, positive effect on the debate about gender within the last decade, opening the door to a number of freedoms that women and men have never before had. But as the number of female-to-male trans people has risen, there has also risen a corresponding fear within the lesbian community that the FTM is gradually erasing the possibility of butch identity.

In addition, the focus on masculinity--in academic circles as well as in the lesbian community--has to some degree marginalized femininity as a valid expression of gender.

Two recent documentaries, [Boy I Am](#) and [Female to Femme](#), bring some of these problematic issues to light by voicing the debate about FTMs and the lesbian community, and giving space to the growing femme movement.

Sam Feder and Julie Hollar's documentary *Boy I Am* follows three transitioning female-to-male trans people as they undergo top surgery and hormone therapy. Typical documentaries about this subject are structured in a progress narrative in which the transperson goes from a state of confusion and gender dysphoria to one of contentment in their new body after surgery and hormone therapy. But though *Boy I Am* does follow this progress narrative through the three transitioning FTMs, it also engages critically with many of the fears that lesbians have about the rising number of FTMs who come out of the lesbian community.

According to *Boy I Am*, these fears, which are often discussed in private but rarely are brought out into public venues, involve a feeling that feminism as a movement is incompatible with transgenderism; that transitioning from female to male has become trendy within the lesbian community; and that one of the costs of this trendiness is a disappearance of butch lesbian identity.

Although *Boy I Am* dutifully follows the transitional paths of 30-year-old Nicco, 22-year-old Norie, and 23-year-old Keegan, it is the discussion of the affect that the

rising number of FTMs has had on the lesbian community that is the most interesting part of the documentary.

Directed and produced by Sam Feder and Julie Hollar, *Boy I Am* attempts to engage with these concerns at an analytical, academic level, and a personal, lived one. At the personal level we have the experiences of Nicco, Norie and Keegan, as well as the commentary of several lesbians who express, explicitly, their concerns about FTMs. It's clear that these women know that by expressing their worries, they may be scapegoated and attacked; one of them, Deb Otkin, who is identified only as a "femme dyke," speaks directly to the camera and invites viewers to throw things at the screen if they disagree with her.

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