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Aug 14, 2012

Max Gail the Bodybuilding Cop

On *Barney Miller* (1975-82), an ensemble comedy about the cops and criminals in a wacky New York precinct, Max Gail played the naïve/dumb hunk Wojo, a precursor to Woody on *Cheers* and Joey on *Friends*. But he was quite a hunk, massive as a bodybuilder in pants so tight he could barely sit down, with soft brown hair, a disarming little-boy grin, and square hard hands that jutted uncomfortably from his wide 70's cuffs. At least one episode showed him shirtless. Who cared if he always failed the detective's exam?



But Wojo offered more than beefcake. In its early seasons, *Barney Miller* featured two swishy gay criminals, and there are hints that Wojo's attempts to bond with them masks a turmoil in his own mind, a growing realization that he, too, has such "feelings." In "Quarantine" he demands of Mr. Driscoll, "Haven't you ever tried it with a girl?" then waxes silent, when the criminal admits that he has indeed tried "it" to the point of siring a son.

Wojo himself tries "it" valiantly and exhaustively for awhile, but then his heterosexual profligacy fades in the face of increasing joy with squad room comrades and outside friends.

In "Wojo's Problem," Wojo discovers that he is sterile, and Officer Levitt (Ron Carey) exclaims "But you're so . . . big!" "That's got nothing to do with it!", Wojo snaps. Sterility comes dangerously close to a metaphor for gayness.

In "Inquisition," Wojo accidentally "outs" a gay cop, who will probably be fired. He says dismally "I feel like such a Judas." Dietrich quips "At least you didn't kiss him." Could kissing be a possibility?

In "Examination Day," Wojo finally passes the detective's exam, and he excitedly makes a phone call:

We can pick up a little food, go to my place, and start celebratin'. But better be ready. . . 'cause this time I'm a sergeant. [Notices Barney staring at him in disapproval, flashes a guilty grin, covers the phone with his hand.] Just telling a few friends the good news.

Presumably the writers expect us to conclude that Wojo is talking to a woman, but he never specifies a gender. If it is indeed a woman, why would Barney evidence such strong disapproval? The cops make personal calls all the time, and certainly Wojo is justified in announcing the good news. Maybe Wojo is planning a romantic dinner with a man.



After *Barney Miller*, Max Gail played beefy, balding hunks in many movies and tv series, including *Whiz Kids*, with [Matthew Laborteaux](#). He has played gay characters several times, most notably on *The Drew Carey Show*, with Batman Adam West as his partner.

Posted by [Boomer D](#)

Labels: [1970s](#), [bodybuilder](#), [cops](#), [Manhattan](#)

1 comment:

Anonymous October 6, 2012 at 1:45 PM

Post a picture of the episode where he's going under cover with Linda Lavin, and she bursts into the room just as he's taking his shirt off. When I was watching it as a kid, I was so shocked that I dropped a pizza slice onto the carpet.

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When Gay Was Unspoken

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No profanity, insults, anti-gay slurs, name-calling, or homophobia allowed.

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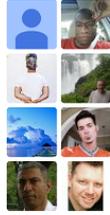
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