From Drag Queens to Leathermen:

Language, Gender, and Gay Male Subcultures

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for Albert Zapata

la felicidad para mí eres tú

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Transcription Conventions

.   End of intonation unit, falling intonation

?   End of intonation unit, rising intonation

H   Rising intonation

H*   High pitch accent

L*   Low pitch accent

<[]>   Phonetic transcription

(.)   Pause of .5 seconds or less

(n.n)   Measured pause greater than .5 seconds

<>   Obscured speech or speech removed for reasons of anonymity

()   gestures or other extralinguistic information

Preface

I am also grateful to my brother "Sweet Joe" Barrett, Elizabeth Krauss Boren, and Ben Boren for long discussions during the planning of this book. They helped me tremendously in thinking about these issues. Thanks to my parents for their continued support. If you happen to be one of my parents, please put this book down now and read no further. Don't look under the Frito bag.

I have been blessed to work with the best librarian on earth, Brad "Krystal" Carrington of the University of Kentucky libraries. I can't count the number of times the "book fairy" left a surprise source in my mailbox. Usually, I was unaware of the existence of the sources Brad found for me and they have proven to be invaluable. I would also like to thank Brian Hurley at Oxford University Press for his help and support.

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CHAPTER ONE

Language, Gender, and Gay Male Subcultures

1.0 Introduction

Although it was once common to refer to "gay subculture" in the singular, the assumption of a single uniform gay subculture is now rare in academic writing.[1] Indeed, as early as 1979, Laud Humphreys, known for his ground-breaking sociological studies of male homosexual behavior, argued against using the term *"subculture"* to refer to gay male communities. His reasoning included issues with the then current theoretical working definition and connotations of *subculture*, which was used primarily in studies of "violent offenders, delinquent gangs, and other criminal or 'deviant' groups" (Humphreys 1979:139). He also felt that the term *gay subculture* failed to account for the existence of a variety of distinct subcultures within the gay community:

> [T]here are a number of well-defined subcultures operating *within* the gay world: a diverse array that includes lesbian feminists, gay academics, suburban couples, street hustlers, drag queens and gay bikers. (1979:140, original emphasis)

Humphreys proposed the term *satellite culture* (which he borrowed from T. S. Eliot 1949) to refer to an intermediary type of culture that is distinct from hegemonic dominant culture but also contains its own subcultures. However, gay subcultures may also have their own sub-subcultures. Drag queen subculture, for example, includes a number of distinct (sub)subcultures, such as *glam queens* (who project a sophisticated, upper-class image), *trash queens* or *clown queens* (who perform comic routines and dress in outrageous, exaggerated costumes), and *street queens* (who work primarily in prostitution and dress accordingly).

Categories of social identity are hierarchical (see Abrams 1999; Tajfel 1981): for example, gay men are a subcategory of men, drag queens are a subcategory of gay men, glam queens are a subcategory of drag queens and so on. The focus of *From Drag Queens to Leathermen* is on groups that can be seen as subcategories of gay men. Of course, there are also subcategories of gay men that arise through the intersection of sexual identity and other social groups unrelated to sexual orientation (such as Asian American gay men, gay male professional athletes, or gay male Catholics). The subcultures in this book, however, do not involve such intersections; in the discussion that follows, subcultural identity entails identification as a gay man. Thus, the notion of a "straight circuit boy," for example, is an oxymoron as being a circuit boy entails being gay.

The contemporary study of subcultures emerges from work in urban ethnography and the study of "social deviance" conducted by social scientists at the University of Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s. Although this research considered a variety of forms of "deviance," especially criminality, the Chicago school also produced a number of important detailed ethnographic studies of sexual subcultures (see Rubin 2002). In the 1970s, the Birmingham school of subcultural studies emerged, focusing less on deviance and more on the relationships between social class and adolescence. The Birmingham school challenged the emphasis on morality and deviance in the work of the Chicago school and focused on the ways in which subcultures may serve as a form of youth resistance, particularly among boys (see Gelder 2007; Halberstam 2005). The Birmingham school emphasized the political implications of style (see Hebdige 1979), a theme that is also important in this book. However, the emphasis on youth in research on

subcultures limits the applicability of theories of subculture for adult gay men, whose experience with dominant culture is quite different from that of heterosexual adolescents. In fact, Judith Halberstam (2005) sees the study of queer subcultures as a way of challenging dominant understandings of youth and adolescence. Because lesbians and gay men may participate in subcultures well into adulthood, Halberstam argues against a view in which "youth cultures" represent a stage or phase in the process of reaching adulthood.

In addition to being subsets of larger dominant communities, subcultures are generally seen as being in opposition to hegemonic culture. Subcultures are thus associated with counterpublic discourses (see Warner 2002) that interact with dominant public discourses. The oppositional relationship between counterpublics and publics is not static, however, and the relationships between subcultures and dominant cultures are regularly contested and altered. The subcultures examined in this book are positioned not only in opposition to dominant heteronormative culture, but also in opposition to dominant understandings of gay male culture. They can therefore be seen as "counter-counterpublics" that challenge the normative ideologies that dominate gay male counterpublics. A subculture like bears (discussed in Chapter Four), for example, challenges heteronormative assumptions of class and gender while also challenging gay male norms concerning physical attractiveness and sexual desirability. Similarly, barebackers (discussed in Chapter Six) challenge gay male ideologies of sexual responsibility as well as heteronormative ideologies about morality and sexual behavior. Thus in addition to being subgroups within an imagined gay community, the subcultures considered in the following chapters are socially positioned in opposition to both

heteronormative culture and hegemonic forms of gay male culture. At the same time, these subcultures may also reproduce some aspects of larger ideological systems. Moreover, as I argue throughout this book, gay male subcultures are crucially constituted through language.

From Drag Queens to Leathermen focuses on six specific gay male subcultures: drag queens, radical faeries, bears, circuit boys, barebackers, and leathermen. Drag queen subculture, the focus of Chapter Two, involves non-normative gender presentation, including cross-dressing and the adoption of a feminine style and demeanor. Although drag queens may public present themselves as "women," they typically identify as gay men, although the boundaries between these categories are not always clear-cut (see Valentine 2007). Chapter Three considers the radical faeries, a subculture grounded in Neopagan and New Age religious movements. Radical faerie identity involves, in part, language that positions faeries in opposition to Christianity. Like many New Age movements, radical faeries appropriate widely from other cultures and religious traditions. Radical faerie identity emerges from the network of relationships between various forms of appropriation. In particular, the appropriation of Native American understandings of gender serve to position radical faeries as being outside of hegemonic gay male culture, which they feel encourages gay men to imitate forms of heterosexual masculinity. Bear subculture, examined in Chapter Four, is founded upon a gay male identity that celebrates being heavyset and hairy and is thus in opposition to the ideals of the body in gay male culture. Chapter Five examines language ideology among circuit boys, a subculture revolving around gay dance parties similar to raves. Chapter Six examines barebackers, a more recently established subculture built around a refusal to

use condoms during anal intercourse; in this way, barebacker identity challenges hegemonic ideologies in the area of public health. Leatherman subculture (discussed in Chapter Seven) is built upon alternative sexual practices, including clothing fetishes, sadomasochism and bondage/domination. These subcultures by no means represent the full spectrum of various gay male subcultures, but have been chosen so as to provide a representative set of case studies to examine the ways in which language serves to variously support and challenge dominant understandings of gender and gay male identity.[2]

The focus of this work is primarily on manifestations of gay male subcultures in North American contexts, although all of the subcultures I analyze are international to some extent. Moreover, with the exception of drag queens, the subcultures examined here are generally dominated by white middle-class gay men. Although Chapter Two focuses on African American drag queens, the case studies in other chapters focus primarily on white gay men. However, race and ethnicity are also important in understanding normative identity within white-dominated subcultures, where the social construction of whiteness may unintentionally restrict participation from gay men of color (see Berubé 2001). The appropriation of white, Southern working-class symbols among bears, for example, may make bear subculture seem less inviting to many gay men who are not themselves white. Finally, the subcultures discussed in the following chapters are for the most part gender-exclusive, so that participation by women is rare or entirely absent. For drag queens, bears, and barebackers subcultural identity entails male gender identity. Women are not consciously excluded from participation in circuit parties but circuit subculture is so dominated by gay male masculinity that women's is extremely rare.

Leather subculture is certainly not exclusively male: and lesbians, bisexual, and heterosexual women are involved in leather culture. However, the discussion of leatherman subculture presented in Chapter Seven focuses on the International Mr. Leather contest, a context in which women's participation is quite rare. As with issues of race and ethnicity, however, gender plays a central role in gay male subcultures, even in exclusively male social contexts.

This chapter outlines the theoretical background that serves as a basis for the case studies that follow. After outlining the approach to LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) taken in much of sociocultural linguistics, the chapter introduces the concepts of *performativity* and *indexicality*, which are basic to the analyses that follow, and discusses their implications for understanding gender ideology, social normativity, the social construction of community and ideologies concerning language use. I then discuss my research methods and my own position as a gay male researcher. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of the subcultures under examination and outlines the remainder of the volume.

2.0   Language and Gender in Gay Male Communities

2.1   Gay male language

Early studies of gay male and lesbian language emphasized "secret" language or argot and tended to focus on the existence of slang terms within gay and lesbian communities (for reviews see Barrett 2006; Jacobs 1996; Kulick 2000; Livia and Hall 1997; Queen 2007). Such studies examined what M. A. K. Halliday called *antilanguage*, or "special forms of language generated by some kind of anti-society" (Halliday 1976:

570). He notes that anti-languages are learned only through resocialization into such "anti-societies":

> An anti-language, however, is nobody's 'mother tongue'; it exists solely in the context of *re*socialization, and the reality it creates is inherently an alternate reality, one that is constructed precisely in order to function in alternation. It is the language of an anti-society." (Halliday 1976: 575)

The potential for language to create an alternative understanding of reality is important for understanding LGBT forms of language. However, the concept of an "anti-society" fails to capture the complexity of the relationship between LGBT counterpublics and dominant forms of heteronormativity. Anti-languages allow for 'secret' communication regarding subcultural social practices associated with non-normative forms of behavior, most often criminal behavior. However, forms of secrecy serve multiple social functions (see Debenport 2009) that extend well-beyond the clandestine activities of anti-societies. After the gay rights movement emerged following the Stonewall riots in New York City in 1969, approaches to LGBT language began to shift. Although the argot model of gay and lesbian language continued into the 1980s (e.g. Hayes 1981; Painter 1981), most studies in the post-Stonewall era tend to focus on other social functions of LGBT forms of language, such as the social construction of community and the expression of sexual identity or sexual desires.

The structure of gay male language in English-speaking contexts varies widely. Polari, a British variety that has largely fallen out of use (Baker 2002, 2004), differs enough from other varieties of English that it is sometimes considered a separate language (e.g., Grimes et al. 1996). The grammar of Polari is primarily English, but Polari differs from other varieties of English in the syntax of negative constructions (Baker 2002). Its vocabulary is drawn from a number of sources, including Lingua

Franca (spoken by merchant marines), Romani and Cockney rhyming slang. The lexicon of Polari extends beyond subcultural domains to include substitutions for everyday vocabulary like "to see" (*varda*), "to wash" (*dhobie*) or "bad" (*cod*). Compared to the differences between Polari and standard British English, the differences between standard varieties of American English and gay male slang in the United States seem almost negligible. Somewhere between Polari and U.S. slang is Gayle, a variety of gay male English in spoken in South Africa with syntax that does not differ from standard English but with a larger range of lexical substitution than that found in the United States. The vocabulary of Gayle includes a number of items from Polari, borrowings from various South African languages other than English and substitutions involving female proper names, such as *Dora* to mean 'drink' (Cage 2003).

Although these three gay male Englishes vary widely in their degree of difference from other English varieties, there is no correlation between linguistic divergence and the social pressure for secrecy. In other words, there is no reason to assume that the distinctiveness of Polari implies any major difference in the degree of homophobia in British culture compared to the United States or South Africa. Similarly, the decline of Polari in the post-Stonewall era should not be seen as resulting from a reduction in the need for maintaining secrecy. Paul Baker (2002) provides a number of factors involved in the decline of Polari, ranging from media overexposure to political backlash against expressions of gay male effeminacy, so that the decline of Polari is not a direct result of a decline in the need for secrecy during the post-Stonewall era.

Another commonly raised issue in studies of language and sexuality has been the question of "authenticity." Debates over whether or not there is a distinctive "authentic"

form of gay male language have surfaced repeatedly in research on gay male language (e.g. Stanley 1970; Hayes 1981; Darsey 1981; Leap 1996; Kulick 2000). Gay male and lesbian language use largely involves the appropriation of language associated with other groups, and the way in which appropriated forms are combined can enlighten local LGBT ideologies of gender and sexuality. Thus, rather than assume that "authenticity" is an inherent or essential cultural trait, the approach I take in this book assumes that authenticity is regularly contested, through what Bucholtz and Hall (2004, 2005) call "denaturalization." That is, authenticity does not exist independent from the discourse that validates or questions the (presumably essentialized) relationship between cultural expression and social identity.

Since the mid-1990s research on gay male language use has shifted away from questions of secrecy or authenticity. The field of queer linguistics (Barrett 1997, 2002; Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 2005; Hall 2003; Livia 2002; Livia and Hall 1997; Queen 2002) draws on feminist theory, queer theory and sociolinguistic theory to examine the ways in which language is used to both reinforce hegemonic heteronormativity and to negotiate non-normative sexualities. As Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall (2004) argue, this approach allows for a unified examination of interactions between sexual ideologies, linguistic practices, and sexual identities.

2.2   Forms of Discourse

The argot model reinforces stereotypes about the "secret" pre-Stonewall homosexual culture, such as the idea that there was virtually no public discourse involving homosexuality in that era. The stereotype of an earlier "closeted" culture has played an important role in gay political movements where being "public" about one's

sexual identity is seen as central to achieving social acceptance for homosexuality. Perhaps because of its political utility, this stereotype is often reinforced in academic writing about homosexuality. For example, in her ground-breaking analysis of the role of the closet in twentieth-century culture, Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick argued that the idea of the closet was founded in post-Stonewall politics:

> Yet even the phrase 'the closet' as a publicly intelligible signifier for gay-related epistemological issues is made available, obviously, only by the difference made by the post-Stonewall gay politics oriented around coming *out* of the closet. (1990:14; original emphasis)

In fact, however, the term *coming out* existed long before Stonewall (Legman lists it in his 1941 glossary, for example) and there were certainly highly public discussions of homosexuality in the media before Stonewall (see Bronski 2003; Chauncey 1994; Loughery 1998). Thus, despite broad social prohibitions on homosexuality, discussions about and among men and women who identified as homosexuals were common. Because of such differences between dominant ideologies and individual behaviors, it is important to distinguish the language of everyday interactions from the language associated with broader social ideologies.

Sociocultural linguists generally distinguish between *discourse*, referring to linguistic structure within texts or interactions between individuals, and *societal discourse*, meaning broad expressions of hegemonic ideologies that dominate public life or discourse in the sense of Michel Foucault 1990 [1976], 1994 [1970]). Because personal interactions occur within contexts that are influenced by societal discourse, the forms of language used in interactions regularly involve associations with ideologies that circulate through society as individuals use language to position themselves with respect to tropes (or recurrent rhetorical figures) from societal discourse. A trope such as "Gay

men are naturally effeminate" allows an individual either to reference forms of femininity to convey gay identity or to avoid the use of markers of femininity in order to challenge the prevailing stereotype. In both cases, however, societal discourse offers a set of citations or cultural references that inform individual expressions of identity. Because of the close connection between (interactional) discourse and societal discourse, research in sociocultural linguistics (including the research presented in this book) often attempts to examine the ways in which individuals use language to construct themselves as social actors within a given cultural context. As the forms of language that may convey specific types of individual identity emerge in culturally-specific contexts, ethnographic knowledge, or an insider understanding of the local culture gained through in-depth fieldwork, is a prerequisite for attempting to understand the relationship between the language use and social meaning. Examining the ways in which individuals assert identities through language sheds light both on questions of how cultural tropes influence the social construction of identity and on the ways in which language is used to convey social meaning.

Although it is generally recognized that expressions of identity are neither static nor monolithic, there is a tendency to segregate research on individual patterns of behavior (or studies at the "micro" level) from studies of broad issues related to societal discourse (or "macro" level studies). Work in sociocultural linguistics attempts to bridge this gap by relating interactional discourse with societal discourse through the concepts of *performativity* and *indexicality*, which play a crucial role in contemporary research.

2.3   Performativity

The concept of performativity comes from J. L. Austin's (1962) work in the philosophy of language. Although most utterances are descriptive, in that they report events or states, some utterances are able to bring about change with "real world" consequences. Sentences like "I now pronounce you married under the laws of the state of Massachusetts," "I think we should see other people," or "I'm gay" perform actions that change social relationships, making them quite distinct from descriptive sentences like "It's snowing." Austin called these types of utterances *performative*. Unlike statements, performative utterances are not evaluated in terms of being "true" or "false," but rather in terms of whether or not they succeed in causing some real-world change. In Austin's terminology, a performative is considered *felicitous* (or happy) if it succeeds and *infelicitous* (unhappy) if it fails. For a performative to be felicitous, it must be a *citation*: that is, the repetition of a prior context in which the performative was also felicitous. A set of *felicity conditions* determines whether or not a performative will end up being an unhappy utterance. These conditions demand that the performative utterance fit the normative expectations associated with previous citations:

- The form of the utterance must match prior citations (e.g. *I now pronounce you man and goat* is infelicitous).

- The social setting or context in which the utterance occurs must match that of prior citations (e.g. A marriage pronouncement in which the participants were all drunk could be subject to annulment).

- The participants must have sufficient authority to performatively enact change (e.g. The speaker must be licensed to perform marriages).

- The participants may need to match specific social identities associated with the performative is uttered (e.g., In many states, the gender identities of participants in a marriage may not be the same).

The concept of performativity has played an important role in studies of gender and sexuality, beginning with Judith Butler's (1990, 1991) assertion that the social behaviors associated with gender are performative in that they enact rather than simply reflect gendered identities. Gender is conveyed through a series of citations involving repetitions of signs, or culturally meaningful behaviors, which are recognized as markers of gender. Butler argues that forms of gender parody (such as drag) demonstrate that performative gender citations have no original source (1990: 138).

Rather than reflecting an essential or natural gendered identity, gender displays may be understood as reflecting normative ideological assumptions about how gender is conveyed, so that gender performances reference other gender performances, none of which results from any original source. Thus gender display is not innate, but individuals are perceived as "feminine" or "masculine" through repetitions of signs or behaviors that are normatively associated with femininity or masculinity.

Butler's extension of performativity to gender studies has resulted in increased attention to non-normative gender performances. However, even in studies challenging normative gender, concepts like femininity and masculinity are often treated as clear-cut binary categories. Discussions of gender among lesbians and gay men often assign labels of feminine/masculine based on rather simplistic understandings of external appearance without full consideration of the range of signs potentially associated with gender. For example drag kings (the lesbian equivalent of drag queens) are sometimes seen as displaying "female masculinity" (e.g. Halberstam 1998), maintaining binary gender distinctions even as they challenge normative assumptions about the relationship between gender performance and anatomical sex. In everyday practice, however, the expression of

gender is much more complex that a simple continuum between "feminine" and "masculine" would suggest. All individuals (regardless of their gender or sexual identity) employ a vast combination of forms that might be associated with gender in addition to forms that mark other aspects of identity or social context. Thus, individuals are not statically positioned at a given point in a linear progression from feminine to masculine, but rather continually move between points that would be non-contiguous on any imagined gender continuum. Once one begins to examine the full range of potentially gendered signs that co-occur in any given interaction, it becomes clear that whole-cloth categorizations of gender as simply "feminine" or "masculine" do not capture the complexity of the situation.

In order to examine how combinations of signs collaborate to convey aspects of identity (such a gender), it is useful to examine the way in which performativity operates through *indexicality*. The model of indexicality presented here builds on a wide range of work in sociocultural linguistics (e.g. Agha 2007; Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 2005; Gal and Irvine 2000; Ochs 1993, 1996; Silverstein 1976, 1998, 2003). Although indexicality has been given relatively little attention in LGBT studies or queer theory, the indexical property of language plays a central role in LGBT interaction and discourse. Indexicality is critical to understanding forms of camp (discussed below) and is central to monitoring questions of sexual identity such as "gaydar" (the presumed ability of lesbians and gay men to recognize other lesbians and gay men).

2.4   Indexicality

Within sociocultural linguistics, the concept of indexicality, taken from the work of philosopher Charles S. Peirce, refers to the relationship between forms of language and the contexts in which they occur. Elinor Ochs defines *index* as follows:

> A linguistic index is usually a structure (e.g. sentential voice, emphatic stress, diminutive affix) that is used variably from one situation to another and becomes conventionally associated with particular situational dimensions such that when the structure is used, the form invokes those situational dimensions. (1996:411)

Because of this conventional association between linguistic structures and social contexts, all utterances carry information related to the social setting in which they occur. Indexical meanings are social in nature, in contrast to referential (or denotative) meanings which are primarily descriptive (rather than performative). Any given referential (denotative) meaning may be conveyed in a variety of forms that differ widely in indexical meaning. For example, *she doesn't, she don't,* and *she does not* all assert the same proposition but create very different social understandings of the speaker in each case. Considering all of the possible details of articulation, emphasis, and intonation that could be employed to evoke social contexts, any utterance contains many more indexical meanings than a simple referential meaning might suggest. Compare a man remarking "That dress looks real good on you" with a man commenting "Girlfriend, that dress makes you look fabulous!" The two utterances have the same basic referential meaning ("You look good in that dress"), but differ in their indexical meanings. The second utterance potentially indexes gay male identity and conveys higher emotional involvement compared with the first utterance. This does not mean that the form of the utterance tells us the sexual orientation of the speaker, but rather that sexual identities are

evoked according to normative expectations about indexical associations between language forms and the contexts in which those forms are used.

Indexical meaning is conveyed not only through the form of an utterance (the manner in which it is said), but also through its content (what is actually said) (see Eckert 2008). Social identity involves not simply "demographic" aspects of identity like gender, but specific roles in an interaction as well as rank and relationship to other participants. (Ochs 1996: 410) Austin's original concept of felicity conditions follow naturally from these various indexical meanings. The content, form, context, and authority of participants all depend on each speaker's ability to indexically entail (or reproduce) the citation of prior (felicitous) uses. Both the indexical meanings involved and the degree to which they serve to evoke prior contexts are constantly negotiated through individual interactions.

Because language involves many different indexical meanings, expressions of identity are always context-specific. Identity involves not simply indexing categories associated with gender, ethnicity, religion, region and class, but conveying identity as a specific type of person behaving in a particular way in a specific context. Gender is indexed simultaneously with a variety of other indexical meanings, including the relationship between the speaker and the context, the speaker's assumptions about their role in an interaction, the speaker's emotional relationship to the context, and knowledge about the participants and the topic under discussion.

Indexical meanings are acquired through direct language socialization (in which linguistic behaviors associated with particular types of interactions may be taught explicitly) and through individual experiences of various interactions involving specific

forms of indexicality. When we experience any form of social interaction, we remember not only what was actually said, but the identity and demeanor of speakers and the context in which the interaction took place. Through repetitions of particular types of interactions, we come to associate specific ways of speaking with various attributes associated with different contexts of interaction. Memories of prior interactional contexts come to serve as exemplars for evaluating contexts as they occur and establishing expectations for the behavior of participants in a given situation. Specific forms come to be associated with specific cultural contexts (what Asif Agha [2007] calls *enregisterment*). Indexical meanings will vary to a certain degree across individuals, due to individual differences in experiencing interactions that serve as citations for interpreting indexicality. However, because recognition of indexical meaning is a necessary precondition for interpreting interactions in context, indexicality serves as the basis for behavioral norms and there are default assumptions about how particular interactions are expected to proceed.

Indexicality is inherently performative in that indexical meanings may be used to either produce or reproduce specific contexts (Silverstein1992). In other words, indexical meanings may acknowledge a context that is already assumed or they may create a new and different context. For example, using in-group gay male slang to a stranger in a gay bar would index a context already in place. In a context where gay male identity cannot be assumed, such as a parent-teacher conference at school, the same slang could be used to create a new context in which the participants' identities as gay men are relevant. Once presumptions about a given context are asserted (or assumed), participants in an

interaction may use indexicality position themselves in relation to the presupposed context.

Indexical meanings determine the ways in which individuals are able to performatively assert their identities as particular types of participants in specific social contexts. The performative nature of gender is thus entirely dependent on the ability of various signs to index a gender identity. Whether or not performative assertions of identity are felicitous depends upon the observers in an interaction recognizing the indexical meanings that link identities and contexts. Because the success of performatives depends on shared understandings of the possible indexical meanings in an interaction, performativity is inherently normative.

2.6   The inherent polyphony of performative identity

Within sociocultural linguistics, identity is viewed both as an individual style of self presentation (e.g. Agha 2003; Eckert 2008) and as a relational construct in which individuals position themselves with respect to one another (see Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 2005). In either view, the construction of identity involves the combination of various indexical signs, or *bricolage* (Hebdige 1979). The indices involved in the construction of identity operate at different *indexical orders* (Silverstein 2003), levels of indexical meaning ranging from those related to a given interactional moment (*angry*, *concerned*, *surprised*, etc.) to broad levels of identity like "speaker of English." It is not the case that various linguistic forms are necessarily associated with a single potential indexical meaning, because every indexical sign is open to interpretation at various orders. Thus, an index of individual stance within an interaction might be interpreted as marking membership in some social category (rather than as the property of an individual).

Indexical signs may thus convey both membership in identity categories and the attributes that serve as the basis for categorization of individuals into identity categories (in addition to personal attributes associated with an individual's self-presentation within a given interaction).

Within social identity theory (e.g. Tajfel 1981; Turner et al. 1987), identity categories are built upon a set of social attributes associated with prototypical members of a category. The attributes associated with a given category may serve as categories themselves (e.g. hard-working people, educated people, etc). This interplay between categories and attributes also plays an important role in indexicality. Because signs may evoke a range of indexical orders, their meaning is highly dependent upon context, including the listeners assumptions regarding the interpretation of the indexical meaning involved. Indexical meanings may be associated with a vast array of linguistic forms, including details of articulation, patterns of pausing and amplitude, intonation, word choice, syntactic structure, and referential content. Every utterance contains multiple forms of indexicality operating at different levels of language structure. Given that each indexical sign may evoke multiple associations at different indexical orders, the amount of indexical meaning within any given utterance is rather astounding.

The linguistic construction of identity involves indexing much more than identity categories. Indices of permanent traits may themselves be ideologically associated with identity categories as potential attributes associated with a category (e.g. the trope "Gay men are prissy"). Language also serves to index *stance*, or the ways in which individuals orient themselves towards other parricipants in an interaction. Stance includes the ways in which individuals position the way in which they are participating in a specific

interaction. This may include the ways in which speakers convey forms of knowledge and emotional states. As with attributes, context-specific stances may be ideologically associated with identity categories (e.g. "Straight men tend to get angry in these sorts of interactions").

Identity is thus inherently *polyphonous* in the sense of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1984); it involves a multiplicity of "voices" that combine to convey a specific identity within a given context. Given the complexity of identity conveyed through indexicality, the view of gender as performative, without specifying precisely how this performativity is accomplished, is rather limited in its ability to capture the level of intricacy involved in the social construction of identity.

In addition to the construction of identity, indexical signs may be associated with aspects of context. In particular, indexical signs may be associated with the place and time in which an interaction (or narrative) occurs. The spatial and temporal envelopes that contain particular narratives or interactions are called *chronotopes*, a literary term refering to the spatio-temporal dimensions in which a narrative takes place (Bakhtin 1981, Silverstien 2003). Chronotopes (*chrono-* for "time", *top-* for "space") provide the basic contextual background upon which narratives are interpreted and understood. Chronotopes may refer to the present moment of interaction, specific historical periods, or to broad imaginary contexts closely tied to social ideologies, like "modern society" (see Dick 2010) or "primitive peoples" (see Stasch 2011).

The interpretation of indexical signs is dependent upon the listener's recognition of the prior contexts evoked through indexicality, including the chronotopes and aspects of participant identity involved. Indexical interpretation is thus inherently normative

because it depends on shared assumptions about the possible contexts of interaction that might occur and the forms of language that are indexically associated with them.

3.0   Language and Gender

3.1   Indexicality and Gender Ideology

Individuals never employ the full range of signs that potentially index a single gender; instead they use signs associated with various indexical orders to assert an identity that is much more nuanced than terms like "feminine" and "masculine" suggest. However, expectations for individual gender expression are often embedded within heteronormative assumptions about both gender and sexuality, in which "excessive" gender displays are proscribed. In cases where individual behavior moves towards indexing gender beyond heteronormative expectations, the individual is likely to be marked as "hypergendered." Thus, leathermen are represented as "hypermasculine" because they use more markers of masculine identity than those normatively expected for heterosexual men, while drag queens are portrayed as "hyperfeminine" because they exceed the normative threshold for the expression of femininity among heterosexual women. The very idea of "hyper" gender presumes heteronormativity as the basis for assessing non-heterosexual expressions of gender. However, the research presented in this book suggests that the language of drag queens and leathermen both regularly involve forms that index both femininity and masculinity. Thus even among those outside the endpoints of an imagined gender continuum, expressions of identity involve a combination of gendered indexicals.

There are certainly numerous forms of language that directly index gender identity, such as gendered pronouns (*she/her/hers* and *he/him/his*). However, gender is

most often conveyed at indexical orders through the association of gendered social categories with specific permanent traits, interactional stances, or participation in specific acts (see Ochs 1996). It is the combination of various traits and stances (e.g. *tough*, *submissive*, *angry*, *natural*) that produces a gendered persona. The normative assumptions about which traits and stances are associated with gender (and how they are indexed) can be seen as a form of *gender ideology* (that is, a set of beliefs about how gender is communicated and understood).

The traits stereotypically associated with gendered social categories are also context-specific, so that a gendered persona will be interpreted according to normative expectations concerning the interactional stances associated with a specific context. This includes expectations concerning the expected affective and epistemic stances associated with specific gendered participant roles. These norms are typically used as the basis for inferences concerning speaker intentions and personal character. Given the power of such inferences, failure to meet normative expectations of the stance-context relationship may have serious consequences (e.g. "Jane wasn't acting like a woman whose husband was just killed" could be used to imply that she might have murdered him).

Gender ideologies vary across gay male subcultures, so that the traits associated with femininity or masculinity are not uniform across the different social groups examined in this book. Although bears (Chapter Four) and circuit boys (Chapter Five) both emphasize masculinity as central to gay male identity, the two subcultures associate masculinity with very different personal traits. For bears, masculinity is associated with being natural, highly sociable, and unconcerned about one's physical appearance. In contrast, circuit boy masculinity is associated with being physically intimidating, socially

distant, and a high degree of self-discipline (particularly with regard to personal grooming). Because gender emerges through a combination of permanent traits, individual traits are open to association with either gender. Thus, seemingly conflicting traits may be associated with the same gender in different cultural contexts, so that "toughness" (for example) is critical to masculinity among leathermen and circuit boys while displays of emotion that might be considered "softness" (such as rampant hugging) are an important part of bear masculinity.

Gender ideologies of masculinity may include traits that might be seen as contrary to the normative construction of masculinity, because they co-occur with (and are "overridden" by) other "masculine" traits, allowing for an overall "masculine" gender persona. The circuit boy focus on physical appearance and self-grooming, for example, would likely index femininity in isolation. But combined with body building, wearing sportswear, and competition for sexual conquests, the focus on looks becomes associated with the discipline of athletics and a desire to gain advantage in the sexual marketplace. The focus on looks is thus framed (Gofman 1974) in terms of masculinity, allowing the "feminine" trait to fit into a broader gender ideology emphasizing masculinity.

3.2   Stereotypes, appropriation, and indexical disjuncture

Because signs evoke meaning at multiple indexical orders, expressions of identity include forms that could be associated with a variety of identity categories. Thus speakers will inevitably index traits and stances indexing social groups in which the speaker might not claim membership. Stereotypes emerge through the ideological process of *erasure* (Gal and Irvine 2001), in which the differences between social groups is minimized. Through erasure, signs indexing personal traits or interactional stances that are not

directly associated with an identity category are often ignored. Stereotypes circulating within societal discourse provide a background for the construction of identity in everyday interactions. Because indexical signs succeed only if they are recognized as citations, the construction of individual personae involves positioning the self in relation to stereotyped assumptions regarding contextualized identities. Of course, no individual fulfills all of the stereotypes associated with a given social category. The construction of a gendered *individual* involves variation across indexical orders so that the permanent traits indexed do not entirely align with stereotyped assumptions about the attributes defining a given identity category. Individuals may also foreground particular traits or stances through frequency of usage or levels of emphasis (see Eckert 2008). The mix of traits and stances thereby indexed positions an individual not just as belonging to some identity category, but as a specific *type* of individual within that category.

Shifts across different indexical orders may result in shifts in indexical signs associated with identity categories. Susan Gal and Judith Irvine (2001) refer to this process as *fractal recursivity*, in which a sign associated with one category (e.g. gender) may come to index some other category (e.g. class). Through fractal recursivity indexical signs may come to be associated with new categories, so that in certain contexts gender may come to be expressed through class, sexuality may be expressed through race, or race may be expressed through class. African American drag queens (discussed in Chapter Two), use a form of language they refer to as "white woman." Although the form is obviously associated with race and gender, in actual use it often indexes social class. Among bears (discussed in Chapter Four), signs associated with white Southern,

working-class identity are used to index gender identity. In such situations, an analysis of gender or sexuality necessitates consideration of other categories of identity.

Normative associations between indices of identity (stance, traits and social groups) and indices of contexts (setting, participant roles, etc.) maintain power structures at all levels of interactions, including both macro (e.g. which social groups may fulfill the participant role of *spouse*) and micro (e.g. who controls the floor in a conversation). Indeed, these relationships between indices of social identity and contextual indices are often controlled by law and struggles for civil rights often involve struggles over the relationships between social group and contexts (e.g. who may fulfill the participant roles in a marriage ceremony) or the relationships between different social groups (e.g. which social groups are allowed to overlap with the social group of *military personnel*).

Despite such public debates, most challenges to normative associations between indexical fields occur in everyday interactions in which an individual uses indexicality in ways that may be unexpected. This may include indexing a specific social identity in proscribed contexts or claiming membership in social groups that are normatively opposed to one another. Participants in the International Mr. Leather contest (discussed in Chapter Five) regularly index traits and stances associated with an identity as "good citizens" while overtly expressing pride in their "outlaw" leatherman identity. Leatherman displays of patriotism challenge normative assumptions in which leatherman identity is marginalized and pathologized as a form of "deviance" that is at odds with the respect and reserve normatively associated with displays of citizenship.

The construction of the self as a social actor through indexicality is perhaps the most fundamental form of human agency, in that it is through indexicality that

individuals assert their position within and across interactional contexts. Challenging norms for indexical interpretation can be seen as forms of *indexical disjuncture* in which a sign (or set of signs) indexes an interactional component that is not normatively associated with the context involved. Indexical disjuncture involves the use of indices that are *marked*, that is, they are counter to normative expectations of the relationship between form and context (see Myers-Scotton 1993, Barrett 1998).

Indexical disjunctures occur commonly across all interactional contexts, but they are particularly relevant for understanding LGBT forms of language use. Among the subcultures discussed in this book, indexical disjuncture is a common way of marking (sub)cultural distinctiveness. Thus, African American drag queens use forms that index white middle-class women, white middle-class bears use forms that index white working-class Southerners, and leathermen who celebrate their marginalized "outlaw" status use forms that index patriotism and citizenship. In addition, forms involving indexical disjuncture are highly valued within the language ideology of *camp* (discussed below). The centrality of indexical disjuncture to LGBT culture can be interpreted as a rejection of the heteronormative gender ideology that marginalizes LGBT individuals. Because interactions are evaluated on the basis of normative assumptions regarding the links between identity with social groups and contexts of interactions, most interactions occur under an ideological assumption or expectation of heterosexuality. This *compulsory heterosexuality* (Rich 1980) leads to the marginalization of LGBT individuals. Indexical disjuncture may produce temporary rifts in the marginalizing heteronormative network of indexical signs through which this marginalization is achieved.

Indexical disjuncture is inherently involved in cases of appropriation. In appropriation indices of an identity category are borrowed by outsiders in an attempt to draw associations with the permanent characteristics (or personality traits) associated with a social group that a speaker does not claim as her or his own. Appropriation operates as a form of indexical analogy across indexical orders and involves only a subset of signs that are normatively associated a particular identity category. Forms of appropriation always involve indexical disjuncture and may simply reinforce hegemonic forms of domination, as in forms of mockery or parody.

Although indexical disjunctures associated with appropriation may serve to support forms of domination, indexical disjuncture can also serve as a form of resistance through challenging normative understandings concerning the authority of individuals to assert particular social identities or interactional stances. However, indexical associations are context-specific, so that the political implications of language use vary across different systems of domination (see Gal 1995). Thus, forms of resistance to one system of domination may reinforce some domination within another system. Although the use of the "white woman" style among African American drag queens challenges hegemonic understandings of gender identity, race, and class, drag queen performances may simultaneously involve forms of misogyny. Similarly, bear discourse challenges hegemonic assumptions about physical attractiveness and masculinity while reinforcing stereotyped assumptions about class and regional identity.

Gender ideologies can be seen as a set of normative assumptions about the organization of gendered indexical signs within and across indexical fields. Because the performative success of indexicality generally depends upon recognition by an

obersver/listener, the personal construction of identity as a gendered individual is always framed within normative assumptions about relationships within and between various indexical orders. Forms that challenge these normative assumptions may themselves become norms within sub-populations, resulting in an alternative counterpublic normativity. Alternative normativities may emerge among successively smaller social groups, allowing for forms of counter-counterpublic discourse. It is through these alternative (but locally normative) ideologies of indexicality that forms of subculture emerge. Local indexical norms may provide the basis for understanding the social and political implications of particular forms of discourse, serving as a means for interpreting 'hidden transcripts' involved in resistance (Scott 1990). Specific forms of indexical disjuncture may also become normative within (counter-)counterpublic discourse. The use of markers of female gender, for example, has been normativized in some gay male communities, such as the drag queens discussed in Chapter Two.

Although norms for indexing sexual identity often involve challenging heternormative assumptions about gender, there is no reason to assume an a priori relationship between gender and sexuality (see Kosofsky-Sedgewick 1990). The subcultures examined here demonstrate that sexual identity often involves non-normative use of indexical meanings primarily associated with social categorizations other than gender. Individuals may index non-heteronormative sexual identities through alternative expressions of class, race and ethnicity, region, or political stance, or through positioning the self with respect to dominant public and counterpublic discourses. However, these various non-gendered ways of challenging normativity often interact with heteronormative gender ideology. Barebacker identity, for example, as discussed in

Chapter Six, is primarily conveyed by indexing a stance in opposition to normative assumptions about public health within gay male counterpublic discourse. However, this oppositional stance may also index permanent traits ideologically associated with masculinity such as an absence of fear, willingness to take unnecessary risks, and rebellion against authority.

Although LGBT language often involves challenging heteronormative gender ideologies, these challenges are not random, but reflect an alternative normative ideology of indexical meanings. These norms allow for *indexical polysemy*, or the ability of a single form of language to have multiple indexical meanings associated with different normative ideologies. Thus an utterance may have distinct interpretations within dominant heteronormative and LGBT counterpublic gender ideologies. The existence of an alternative ideology of indexical interpretation makes LGBT communities imaginable and allows for the negotiation of community membership in everyday interactions.

4.0 Language Ideology and Gay Male Culture

4.1 Camp as Language Ideology

Within sociocultural linguistics, the term *language ideology* is used to refer to the set of beliefs concerning the indexical associations of particular linguistic forms. (see Schieffelin et al. 1998; Silverstein 1998) This includes beliefs about the appropriateness of 'fit' between an utterance and its context (that is, the set of indexical meanings at play in a given interaction) as well as beliefs about the symbolic value (Bourdieu 1993) of particular forms of language. Thus, language ideologies serve as the basis for prejudice towards speakers of specific varieties (e.g. "Speakers with strong Southern accents are uneducated") and the evaluations of specific interactions, such as interpreting stance in

specific contexts as polite, rude, aggressive and so on. In terms of the symbolic value of specific linguistic forms, language ideologies include ideas about what types of language indexically mark positive or negative personal traits (e.g. articulate, educated, witty).

Language ideologies regulate and reproduce normative expectations for interactions within a given community. Within counterpublics where non-normative forms of language use have become normativized, alternative language ideologies may emerge. Because language ideologies are crucial in the interpretation of everyday interactions, speakers exposed to alternative language ideologies may arrive at multiple interpretations of a single interaction.

Language ideologies play an important role in the social construction of gay male subcultures. Although many beliefs about language are specific to a given subculture, the language of the subcultures in this study often involves more generalized gay male language ideologies. In particular, *camp* forms of discourse occur regularly in the language of most of the subcultures in this work. Camp can be seen as a language ideology in which particular forms of language are given high symbolic value on the basis of both their linguistic and rhetorical strucutre and their ability to index interactional contexts associated with gay culture.

Camp is notoriously difficult to define, with some scholars focusing on characteristics associated with camp (exaggeration, affect, effeminacy) and other scholars focusing on how to categorize camp itself (as an aesthetic or political statement). Cleto describes the difficulty in defining camp as follows:

> "…the slipperiness of camp has constantly eluded critical definitions and has proceeded in concert with discursive existence of camp itself. Tentatively approached as *sensibility, taste, or style,* reconceptualised as *aesthetic* or *cultural economy*, and later asserted/reclaimed as (*queer*)

> *discourse*, camp hasn't lost its relentless power to frustrate all efforts to pinpoint it down to stability, and all the 'old' questions remain to some extent unsettled…" (Cleto 1999: 2)

One problem with many theories of camp is that they attempt to define it as a sensibility or aesthetic that is independent of the context in which it occurs. This approach fails to capture the role of camp in actual interactions. Critics within queer theory or LGBT studies have long criticized straight interpretations of camp (e.g. Sontag 1964) for separating camp from LGBT cultures. Rather than view camp as a matter of taste, Mark Booth argues for a view of camp as a form of self-expression:

> Camp is primarily a matter of self-presentation rather than of sensibility. If you are alone and bored at home, and in desperation you try to amuse yourself by watching an awful old film, you are not being camp. You only become so if you subsequently proclaim to others that you thought Victor Mature was divine in *Samson and Delilah*. China ducks on the wall are a serious matter to 'straights', but the individual who displays them in a house of otherwise modernist and modish furniture is being camp." (Booth 1983:17)

Booth's approach recognizes that camp plays a role in the performative assertion of identity. However, it does not fully account for the role of a listener/observer in interpreting a given object or interaction as camp. As with any performative, the interpretation of camp depends upon whether or not the listener/observer having some prior experience of camp that provides a citation linking the situation in question with camp. Camp is thus as much about *interpretation* as it is about self-presentation and theorists may disagree about whether or not an utterance or object can be considered an example of camp. Within theories of camp, there is often tension between the idea of a "gay sensibility" that exists independently of individual understandings of camp and the idea that the meaning of camp depends

on individual interpretations. Britton describes this tension as a "dilemma" inherent in all research on camp:

> All analysts of camp arrive eventually at the same dilemma. One the one hand, camp 'describes those elements in a person, situation or activity which express, or are created by, a gay sensibility' (Babuscio 1977: 40). On the other hand, 'camp resides largely in the eye of the beholder' (Babuscio 1977: 41) (Britton 1999 [1978]: 140)

A view of camp as language ideology escapes this dilemma. Because interpretations depend upon the ways in which prior experiences lead to individual assumptions about what "counts" as camp, camp depends upon the individual "eye of the beholder." However, these individual assumptions evolve through language socialization, including interactions in which "gay sensibility" plays a central role. Because no two individuals have exactly the same life experiences, assumptions about categorizing contexts as forms of camp vary across individuals. On the other hand, individual assumptions about camp are based upon repetitions of camp citations that reproduce normative assumptions about what "gay sensibility" might mean. Thus, although understandings of camp are unique to individuals, these individual interpretations are dependent upon (alternative LGBT) norms for interpreting indexical signs.

Another issue important in theories of camp is the relationship between camp and LGBT cultures. The view of camp as independent of LGBT culture, raised in Sontag's (1964) highly influential "Notes on Camp," allows for the possibility of straight producers of camp style. Although there is no *a priori* reason to assume that heterosexuals cannot produce forms of camp style, this approach ignores the importance of gay language socialization in the interpretation of camp. Thus, heterosexuals familiar with citations of camp within LGBT communities are certainly capable of both producing

and recognizing camp. Similarly, heterosexuals unfamiliar with camp normativity may unintentionally produce forms that are interpreted as camp by LGBT observers/listeners. Thus, while camp is not exclusively controlled by LGBT individuals, interpretations of camp are highly dependent upon the normative set of citations that circulate within and across LGBT communities.

Related to the "cultural uniqueness" issue is the question of whether or not camp necessarily involves gay male effeminacy. Halberstam (1998), for example, claims that drag kings (the lesbian equivalent of drag queens) do not seem to produce forms of camp, possibly because camp is exclusively focused on femininity. Of course, the categorization of drag king performances as "not camp" is an individual aesthetic judgment. Indeed, having seen performances by the drag kings Halberstam analyzes, I personally found them to be extremely camp. The difference in perspective obviously results from evaluations of potential forms of camp being based on different sets of camp citations. Although numerous forms of camp involve gay male expressions of effeminacy, there is no reason to assume that these are the *only* examples of camp. Among the subcultures in this work, camp tropes are regularly used in the construction of *masculinity*. Within the language ideology of circuit subculture, for example, camp utterances have high symbolic value that is detached from other stereotypical forms of gay male effeminacy. Circuit interactions involving camp citations serve to distinguish gay and straight forms of masculinity rather than reproducing stereotypes of gay male effeminacy.

Because of the importance of camp in gay male culture, language socialization in gay male communities often involves the development of a set of (individual) aesthetic judgments for the evaluation of camp. Camp thus serves as a type of 'folk wisdom'

(White 1988, cited in Harvey 2000:254) involving the alternative language ideologies within gay communities. Successful forms of camp typically involve indexical polysemy in that they are open to both a dominant heteronormative interpretation (for example, as "bad taste" or "outrageous behavior") and an alternative LGBT interpretation (as forms of camp or ways of expressing sexual identity). The alternative interpretation indexes forms of gay sensibility, particularly in cases that question heteronormative assumptions concerning style and taste. In many cases, evocations of indexical polysemy can be quite subtle, involving small rifts in heteronormative ideologies of indexicality. In gay male forms of camp, this subtlety often conveys assumptions about gay male superiority in areas of taste, style or self-presentation. Booth's example of China ducks in a room filled with otherwise modernist furniture, for example, incorporates a single mocking reference to "straight style" taken out of context. This produces an indexical disjuncture in which the ducks themselves index the inferior (even laughable) character of heterosexual approaches to fashion, interior design and self presentation. The political potential for camp (which some theorist laud and others deny altogether) emerges from such indexical disjunctures that create rifts in heteronormative cognitive associations between signs and contexts and challenge hegemonic assumptions concerning style and self-presentation.

The actual form of camp utterances typically involves a specific set of linguistic tropes that may be indexically associated with camp style. Harvey (1998, 2000, 2002) describes the set of interactional styles typically associated with camp. These tropes are not specific linguistic forms, but rather represent "orientations to language use that allow speakers to manipulate the potential of language systems and discourse contexts" (Harvey 2000: 5). Harvey (2000) categorizes camp talk into four broad categories:

paradox (incongruities in register, combinations of 'high' culture and 'low' experiences), inversion (of gender markers or expected rhetorical routines), ludicrism (puns or double-entendre), and parody (of gender norms or aristocratic mannerisms). These tropes are certainly not exclusive to camp, but represent the types of language use that are most valued within camp language ideology.

The ideology of camp language use plays an important role in the social construction of subcultural identity. The set of camp tropes outlined by Harvey are often used to produce indexical disjunctures specific to the dominant language ideology within a given subculture. The forms of camp found in the discourse of different subcultures vary, although they are all orientated in opposition to heteronormative assumptions about the interpretation of indexical signs.

4.2   Sex and Sociality

In comparing ethnographic studies of lesbian communities with studies of gay male communities, Esther Newton notes that in addition to having more money and social power, gay men seem to have more "sex partners and institutions designed to facilitate sexual interaction" (Newton 2000: 158). The ubiquity of gay male spaces related to sexual interaction (baths, bars, public restrooms, cruising areas, etc) reflects the importance of sexuality in gay male sociality. All of the studies Newton examined suggest that gay men have more sexual partners compared to lesbians and that gay men have more diverse sets of sexual partners in terms of differences in class, ethnicity and age (Newton 2000:159). This does not mean that gay male culture is not classist, racist, or ageist. Rather it suggests that crossing lines of social difference in sexual interactions is often highly valued within gay sexual markets. In his ethnographic study of 1970s

"clone" culture, Levine (1998) notes that among white middle-class clones, working-class men and men of color were eroticized and highly valued as sexual partners. This view is clearly related to broader trends in social discourse in which working-class men and men of color are imagined as more masculine than white, middle-class men (see Ortner 2006). Forms of social discourse that establish norms for sexual interactions can be seen as *ideologies of desire* that place symbolic values on specific types of sexual partners within a given *sexual marketplace* (Ellingson et al. 2004).

The importance of sexual interactions as a form of sociality in gay male communities serves to index masculinity through linking a high libido (as a personal trait) with gay male identity. Essentialist views of sexuality and gender typical view male sex drive as difficult to control, with a stronger sex drive being associated with "natural" masculinity. The centrality of sexual interactions in many (though certainly not all) gay male social settings serves to reinforce gay men's identity *as men* and challenges views of gay men as naturally effeminate. The importance of sexual interaction in gay male culture may also be related to a psychological desire for validation and recognition of one's sexual identity in social contexts where the erasure of homosexual desire is common. Sex with other men is perhaps the strongest possible validation of the idea that one is not alone in having homosexual desires.

The subcultures in this work can be seen as "sexual subcultures" in that they are often associated with specific sexual markets. Bear identity, for example, emerged among men who felt highly marginalized (even ostracized) within the dominant gay male sexual marketplace because of their physical appearance. Leathermen, circuit boys and barebackers all assert identities that are indexically linked to specific sexual practices and

desires. The assertion of subcultural identity often involves the social construction of the self that categorizes an individual as a specific type of commodity within gay male sexual markets. Ideologies of desire place symbolic value on these commodity identities, which are linked to participant roles in specific sexual scenarios.

Specific contexts for sexual interaction following specific narrative progressions tied to normative understandings of how sex should proceed as a form of social interaction. These normative narratives of sexual interaction are called *sexual scripts* (Gagnon and Simon 1973, Gagnon 2004). Sexual scripts (such as *one-night stand*) govern individual expectations for the display of specific identities during sexual interactions. The normative character of sexual scripts can be seen in the "hanky code" among gay clones in the 1970s in which individual expressions of sexual identity do not seem to directly coincide with the actual sexual behavior of individuals, but rather produce a locally normative set of culturally salient sexual contexts that individuals may index to assert their identity as sexual individuals.

4.3   The Hanky Code and Gay Male Sexual Scripts

In the clone culture of the 1970s, gay men began carrying bandanas in their back pockets to index specific participant roles in sexual scripts. The bandanas were those traditionally carried or worn by ranch hands, construction workers, or members of youth gangs, providing an unquestionably masculine accessory that coded sexual identity. The practice of wearing bandanas among clones was appropriated from earlier development of the hanky code among leathermen (see Chapter Seven). Although leathermen largely abandoned the hanky code after it became ubiquitous among clones, it is still an important marker of identity in some subgroups within leatherman subculture. Today the

hanky code is largely seen as a humorous and playful "joke" about sexual practices, but it played an important role in normativizing the range of gay male sexual scripts in the early post-Stonewall period. Because the hanky code is important for the construction of several of the subcultural identities in this book, it merits special attention.

The bandanas, as well as sets of keys, served as semiotic codes to mark one's preference for specific sexual acts (see Levine 1998: 65-67). Keys were a part of the clone "uniform" and were hung on the belt loops of one's Levi's jeans. Hanging one's keys on the right meant that an individual was a bottom (the receptive partner in anal or oral sex) while keys hung on the left meant that an individual was a top (the insertive partner in anal or oral sex). Bandanas (or "hankies") were folded into a rectangle and worn in one's back pocket, with the left or right pocket corresponding to top or bottom respectively. Different colors of hankies corresponded to specific sexual acts. Throughout the 1970s various forms of the hanky code were circulated in gay bars and publications throughout North America and Western Europe. Although the list provided by Levine (1998) is typical, the codes in various publications did not always correspond exactly in terms of which sex acts were included in the code and what colors were used (Forbes 1978, Guenther 2004). Levine (1998: 66, Table 3.3) gives the hanky code used in 1970s New York, shown below:

The Erotic Proclivities Signified by Clone Bandanas (Levine 1998: 66)		
Color	Proclivity	
	Left Side	Right Side
Black	Heavy S & M, top	Heavy S & M, bottom
Blue, light	Wants blow job	Expert Cocksucker
Blue, drak	Fucker	Fuckee
Blue, robin's egg	69-er	Anything but 69
Brown	Spreads scat	Receives scat
Green	Hustler, selling	Trick, buying

Mustard	Has 8 inches or more	Wants big one
Olive drab	Military uniforms	Likes military
Pink	Dildo giver	Dildo received
Purple	Piercer/genitorturer	Piercee/etc.
Red	Fist fucker	Fist fuckee
White	Jack off, self	I'll do us both
Yellow	Water sports, top	Water sports, bottom
Light brown	Likes to be rimmed	Likes to rim

Table 1: Hanky code as used among 1970s clones

The earliest known version of the hanky code was published in 1969 (Guenther 2004: 3), a few months before the Stonewall riots that symbolically mark the historical beginning of the gay right movement. Although the first code was published in New York, it reported the hanky code as a West Coast phenomenon (Guenther 2004). In terms of the categorization of sexual identities, the hanky code emerged at a crucial point in the shift in social discourse from a view in which homosexuality was largely understood in terms of gender identity (i.e. gay men are "like women") to understanding sexuality in terms of the gender of one's sexual partner independent of one's own gender performance. In the pre-Stonewall era, the predominant means of conveying homosexual identity was through *fairy* identity, which involved highly effeminate behavior. Fairies were assumed to be bottoms sexually, with the role of top being indexically associated with *queers,* openly homosexual men who did not identify as fairies, or *trade,* men who identified as heterosexual but had sex with other men (see Chauncey 1994, Loughery 1998). The indexical signs associated with identities in the emergent masculinity-based post-Stonewall view of gay male identity erased the prior use of gender display as the primary means of indexing one's status as a top or bottom in sexual interactions. The hanky code allowed individuals to index aspects of sexual identity that were otherwise

absent in the traditional clone uniform. The use of right to indicate "top" undermines the normative indexical relationship between "right" and dominance.[3]

By delimiting a set of sexual practices that one might index through wearing a specific bandana, the hanky code is highly normative. Although the list of sex acts in the hanky code is fairly broad, it is certainly not exhaustive. It proscribes certain forms of sexual interaction that do not easily fit with the masculinist gender ideology of clone culture. For example, forms of sexual interaction associated with emotional intimacy (such as kissing or cuddling) are excluded from the codes, possibly because of their potential indexical association between emotional display and femininity. However, wearing a particular bandana did not necessarily mean that an individual would only perform the sexual act marked by his bandana. The system marked preferences within a normative set of possibilities, but did not actually dictate sexual behavior.

Similarly, the early hanky codes are binary systems that do not allow individuals to index a versatile identity. Although later versatiles (men who are open to being either a top or a bottom) began hanging keys from the middle belt loop in the back of one's Levi's, this option does not occur in the early hanky codes and is not mentioned in Levine's description. It may be that the centrality of the top/bottom distinction was residue from the indexical associations in the earlier gender-based system of sexual categorization.

Although the hanky code required individuals to mark themselves as either a top or bottom for most sexual practices, this does not correspond to Levine's description of actual clone sexual practices. Although Levine states that identity as a top or bottom was primarily one of individual preference, versatile clones were common. Barring an

individual preference for being top or bottom, the roles in sexual intercourse were typically determined by physical attributes and personal demeanor. Levine (1998: 97) notes that for versatiles, the man who assumed the role as top was typically the one with a larger penis, more physical prowess (taller or more muscular) or more masculine behavior. These same attributes were associated with men who identified as tops (with bottoms assumed to have smaller penises or more effeminate behavior). However, Levine notes that these norms were regularly broken and that there were both effeminate tops with small penises and masculine, well-endowed bottoms. Identifying as a top or bottom does not necessarily dictate sexual behaviors, as a self-identified 'top' might take the 'passive' role in some sexual interactions (see Murray 1996, Hart et al. 2005). The assumptions about the relationship between physical and personality traits of tops and bottoms maintains the indexical relationships between gender and sexual role found in the gender-based categorization associated with fairy culture. Thus, the semiotic relationships between signs that index gender and signs that index sexual roles was marginally maintained despite the regular disregard for these indexical meanings in actual practice.

The hanky codes emerged at a historical moment when the categorization of men identifying as gay had shifted radically and the hegemonic ideology in which gay male femininity was being abandoned due to its association with a pathological view of homosexuality. Because the code specifies a limited range of options for identification, it establishes normative expectations for gay male sexual behavior. The association between sexual acts and individual identity also sets delimits a specific range of sexual possibilities, providing individuals with ways of positioning themselves within an

emergent sexual market. In this sense, sexual scripts serve as a set of normative potential interactional contexts that individuals may index in the construction of identity.

5.0   Studying Sexual Subcultures

Halberstam (2005) argues that queer subcultural studies challenges traditional assumptions about the relationship between researcher and subcultural participation because members of specific subcultures are often directly involved in the scholarly examination and theoretical implications of participation in a given subculture. Indeed, many of the prior theoretical and descriptive accounts of the subcultures examined in this book are produced by members of the subcultures under consideration. However, I do not personally identify as a member of any of the subcultures considered here. As a gay man, I am personally sympathetic with the experiences of marginalization felt by members of various subcultures, both within larger gay communities and within heteronormative society. Although this book is certainly not intended as "native ethnography," my perspective is not entirely that of an outsider either.

My analysis of gay male subcultures is based in ethnographic approaches to discourse analysis within sociocultural linguistics. As such, it is inherently qualitative and interpretive. This approach combines close ethnographic analysis of the indexical associations relevant within specific subcultures with interactional and textual analysis that examines the ways in which local indexical associations serve to convey subcultural identity by linking specific permanent social traits and interactional stances with social groups (both within and outside of imagined subcultural communities).

Although I take an ethnographic approach to each of the subcultures, the methods involved varied for different subcultures. The research on drag queens, circuit boys, and leathermen all involved participant observation in actual communities. Research on all of the subcultures included on-line research including participant observation in virtual communities. My own observations are, of course, supplemented by prior ethnographic research concerning gay male subcultures. Although the research methods on cultural background varied across subcultures, I approach the analysis of various forms of subcultural discourse from an ethnographic perspective. An analysis linking ethnographic insight to specific uses of language sheds light on both the ways in which language reflects subcultural norms and the ways in which individual forms of language serve in the construction of subcultural identity.

Of course, individual perceptions of identity vary widely, and there is no one-to-one relationship between self-labeling as a member of some subculture and actual use of any particular forms of language associated with that subculture. Self-identification may vary even for individuals within the same context (see Valentine 2007), so that normative categorizations of identity are always in flux. The analyses here represent norms within subcultures which (like all forms of normative behavior) may be openly challenged or negotiated by individuals in specific contexts.

The subcultural case studies in the following chapters consider a wide range of different types of discourse, ranging from forms of naturally-occurring interactional discourse to written texts that are consciously planned and edited. Although the examples represent widely divergent forms of language use, they all involve language

that is public in some way. This includes public performances (in the chapters on drag

queens and leathermen), internet texts (in the analyses of bears and barebackers), and

media publications such as books and magazines (in the analyses of radical faeries and

circuit boyx). In cases involving internet discourse, only sources that are available to

the general public are used (i.e. sites that do not require some form of membership or

registration). The decision to use only public forms of language is meant to emphasize

the highly public nature of gay subcultures in order to challenge traditional views of

gay male language as involving only secret codes or covert forms of communication.

6.0   Language, Gender, and Gay Male Subcultures

The first case study (Chapter Two) examines the language used in

performances by African American drag queens (AADQs), based on research I

conducted at gay bars in the Texas cities of Houston and Austin. Historically, drag

queens are by far the oldest subculture included in this study. By associating

expressions of effeminacy with gay male identity, drag queens reflect pre-Stonewall

understandings of homosexuality as conveyed through non-normative gender

expression. In the post-Stonewall masculinist ideology, drag queens have been further

marginalized within gay male communities in which effeminate behavior is

interpreted as reinforcing out-dated stereotypes of gay male effeminacy. Following the

release of the documentary *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990), which examined

African American and Latino drag culture in New York, academic writing on AADQs

tended to focus on the importance of whiteness in the construction of AADQ identity

(see hooks 1992). The analysis of AADQ performances presented in Chapter Two

challenges the view that AADQs are somehow trying to "act like white women".

Although the AADQs studied here use a language style that they refer to as "white woman," it is often used to contest stereotypes of whiteness by performative asserting a *class* identity. The analysis also challenges the idea that drag queens want to be women. In their performances, AADQs regularly produce indexical disjunctures in which the "white woman" style is interrupted with forms from African American English that are indexically associated with working-class masculinity. Conversely, AADQ performances additionally challenge some feminists' view of drag as inherently politically liberating (see Butler 1990, 1993), as the performances may involve forms of sexism and misogyny.

The third chapter examines language use by radical faeries, focusing on the analysis of *Ye Faerie Hymnal*, a collection of songs used at radical faerie gatherings. The radical faerie movement is a Neopagan/New Age subculture of gay men. Radical faeries appropriate widely from across different cultural and religious traditions. Indeed, faerie understandings of gender are largely appropriated from Native Americans. The chapter examines the ways in which chronotopes intersect in the music associated with radical faerie gatherings and ritual practice. The chapter looks at the ways in which radical faerie identity emerges from intersections between indexical signs associated with different times and places associated with various religions and cultures.

Chapter Four considers the emergence of bear identity on the Bears' Mailing List (BML), an internet mailing list that began in the late 1980s as a space for gay men who felt marginalized within gay communities because they were overweight or had large amounts of body hair. As with AADQs, the social construction of bear identity is closely tied to indices of social class, employing signs typically associated with the rural working

class in the South. In postings to the BML, some middle-class urban bears regularly use non-standard orthography; this language use typically involves indexical disjunctures in which these ideologically Southern working-class signs are joined with forms of language associated with camp displays of sophistication, such as the use of French. These indexical disjunctures allow bears to draw upon rural Southern identities in order to index masculinity without actually asserting an identity as working-class or Southern.

In Chapter Five, the language ideology of circuit subculture is examined, focusing on the symbolic value given to particular forms of language in *Circuit Noize*, the primary magazine promoting circuit parties. Circuit subculture emerged in the late 1980s as a "circuit" of large dance parties began to be held in order to raise funds for charities involved with AIDS/HIV care and research. The parties have been widely criticized for their emphasis on the use of club drugs and anonymous sexual encounters. Although circuit parties are typically viewed as a "cult of masculinity" (Signorile 1998), the language ideology in *Circuit Noize* places high value on forms of camp that are traditionally associated with gay male effeminacy. The use of camp in circuit subculture serves to highlight cultural distinctions between gay and straight forms of masculinity, with circuit forms of camp index permanent traits of intelligence and wit, thus reinforcing circuit gender ideologies in which circuit boys are seen as superior exemplars of masculine behavior compared to heterosexual men.

Chapter Six examines the barebacker subculture that emerged in the late 1990s. Barebacker identity is typically pathologized in both media and academic writing that focuses on a small subset of barebackers who claim to desire to spread or contract HIV (known as "bugchasers" and "gift givers"). However, the overwhelming majority of

barebackers do not abandon the idea of "safe sex" entirely and attempt to practice *serosorting*, in which men only have sex with other men who share their HIV status (i.e. HIV-positive men only have sex with other HIV-positive men). The analysis examines "sex blogs," a types of public sex diary, in which barebackers post narrative descriptions of their sexual experiences. The analysis focuses on the ways in which barebacker identity is constructed through the use of stance. By avoiding direct expressions of moral stance and highlighting other interactional stances, barebackers are able to position themselves as rational actors in sexual interactions without overtly addressing the question of morality associated with intentional unprotected sex. In addition, the use of stance serves to establish norms for positioning barebacker identity with respect to both condoms and semen. Of course, all forms of normativity are regularly challenged and the authors of barebacker sex blogs regularly report attempts at making informed decisions concerning safe sex, including knowing the medical history of their partners, using condoms in certain contexts and attempting to discern a potential partners HIV-status based on his physical appearance or personal demeanor.

After drag queens, leathermen (discussed in Chapter Seven) are the oldest subculture included in this book. Leatherman subculture emerged in the 1950s among veterans of the Second World War who found the prevailing fairy culture antagonistic to their masculine identity. Early leatherman culture was closely tied to the motorcycle gang culture of the 1950s and eventually became a safe space for men interested in alternative forms of sexuality such as sadomasochism, and bondage and domination. The analysis examines interdiscursivity in public speeches by contestants at the International Mr. Leather (IML) contest, an annual pageant-like contest among leathermen. IML

contestants regularly use indexical disjunctures involving explicit references to alternative sexuality combined with traditionally conservative forms of political discourse associated with citizenship. By juxtaposing "outlaw" sexuality with expressions of patriotism and civic responsibility, the IML contestants challenge their marginalized position within both gay communities and society at large without assimilating to hegemonic norms of sexual morality.

7.0 Conclusion

From Drag Queens to Leathermen argues that gay male identities involve forms of diversity that extend beyond traditional categories of gender, race and ethnicity, and class. Although these social categorizations are central to understanding forms of gay male identity, they have distinct meanings across various subcultures. For example, drag queens and circuit boys are oriented towards middle- and upper-class identities, while bears are oriented towards working-class identity. Similarly, the indexical meanings that index specific aspects of sexual identity may vary across subcultures. For example, the act of shaving body hair is indexically associated with femininity among bears and with masculinity among circuit boys.

It is often assumed that sexuality is universally conveyed through expressions of gender. Although gender is key to understanding the semiotics of sexual identity within the various subcultures examined in this book, other social categorizations play an equally important role. The gay men involved in these subcultures all assert identities that are positioned in opposition to hegemonic understandings of sexuality, but the indexical means of expressing social difference involves much more than challenging heteronormative understandings of gender.

From Drag Queens to Leathermen demonstrates that understandings of language use are critical to the study of gay male subcultures (as well as LGBT communities more generally). In addition to considering different subcultures, each of the case studies in this book highlights a distinct approach to considering the relationship between language and culture. The analysis of drag queens (Chapter One) emphasizes the polyphonous character of identity construction, while the examination of radical faeries (Chapter Two) looks at relationships between chronotopes. Chapter Three (on bears) focuses on linguistic appropriation, while Chapter Four (on circuit boys) looks at the process of linguistic differentiation. The analysis of barebackers (Chapter Six) considers the use of stance and the study of leathermen focuses on interdiscursivity, of the relationships between social discourses. All of the analyses involve cases of indexical disjuncture, which I argue is central to the construction of LGBT identities. Although indexical disjuncture is certainly not unique to LGBT language use, it has the potential for creating rifts in the hegemonic network of indexical meanings that marginalize LGBT individuals.

Notes

1. One exception seems to be in research on marketing, where the idea of a gay subculture seems to still have currency (e.g. Halsop et al. 1998; Kates 2002).

2. Previous studies of gay male subculture reflect variation in the importance of specific subcultures within gay communities across different local contexts of gay male culture. Jones (2001: 140) list five major "tribes" (or subcultures) within gay male culture in Lexington, Kentucky: twinks (a broad category that includes circuit boys), drag queens, leathermen, bears and cowboys. Hennen's (2008)

examination of gender in gay male subcultures focuses on Radical Faeries, bears and leathermen.

3. Some colors in the hanky code do not involve the top/bottom distinction, but simply mark opposites. For example, the top/bottom distinction doesn't make sense for "69" (mutual fellatio) so that the left/right distinction simply marks preference/dispreference rather than top/bottom.

CHAPTER TWO

Fierce Fish Who Pee: Indexicality and Identity
Among African American Drag Queens

1.0   The night I met Lynn Whitfield

I had spent four hours searching Houston fabric stores for a 36-inch peacock-colored zipper to complete Chanikwa Chanel's new dress.[1] My friend Grainger was putting together a drag show honoring legendary African American female vocalists at The Attic, a gay bar with primarily African American clientele. Chanikwa was going to play the part of Josephine Baker. The new dress was custom-made to match one that Lynn Whitfield had worn in a film about Baker's life. Given that I am color-blind and have no idea what color "peacock" might be, this was no easy task and I had to continue searching until I found a zipper that actually said "peacock" on the label. When I finally returned to Grainger's house, he called Chanikwa and her dress maker for a final fitting.[2] Chanikwa arrived three hours later and said that she "rushed right over" from the bar down the street because she was so excited to try on the dress. She then turned to a bowl of fruit on Grainger's dinner table and pronounced, "Grainger, there's an orange on your table and I need to eat it." As she began to peel the orange, Grainger pulled out the dress. Chanikwa tossed the half-peeled orange onto the couch and began to scream, "That dress is *fierce*!" She turned to the man who had made the dress, "Girl, you *peed* for that dress!" Among African American drag queens (hereafter AADQs), to say that something is *fierce* means for it is so exceptionally stylish or impressive that it draws attention. To *pee* means to do something exceptionally well.[3] For example, Grainger told me that I "peed for" his stereo, because I was able to figure how to connect an old turn-table with his system in order to

record from his LPs for the upcoming show. A drag queen "pees" if she persistently performs exceptionally well.

"In this dress, they will *all* be standing in my shade. They know that *this*," Chanikwa continued, pointing at herself, "is *real* fish. They're all just Tuna Helper next to me." The term *fish* refers to women. A drag queen who is "real fish" could pass as a real woman, as opposed to being "Tuna Helper," a drag queen who is obviously male.

Once the dress had finally been adjusted and the zipper was in place, Grainger gave Chanikwa a box of sequins and instructed her on where to sew them in order to finish the dress. By the time everything was done, it was well after midnight and I offered to give Chanikwa a ride home. Chanikwa packed up her dress and sequins in a brown paper bag and we headed off. As we began to drive, Chanikwa continued her praise for the new dress, telling me that Grainger had picked her to be Josephine Baker because she was so much more sophisticated than all of the other drag queens in Houston. "You know, I *belong* in Paris," she said, "I am too upscale for this backwoods town."

I already knew that Chanikwa lived with her mother in a housing project in the Fifth Ward, which had the reputation of being one of Houston's roughest neighborhoods. I also knew that Chanikwa didn't have an easy life. When I had seen her at The Attic the week before, she had a black eye and her thick make-up couldn't hide the bruises on her face. When I had asked her what had happened, she told me, "You know, sometimes those boys can just be so *rough*. They just can't control themselves around my beauty." When I suggested that she call the police, Chanikwa laughed and asked, "You want me to get beat up twice?" Part of the reason I had wanted to give her a ride home this evening was that I feared she might not be safe so late at night.

As we got closer to Chanikwa's home, she asked me, "You *do* know you're going to the projects, right?" I answered that I did, indeed, know. "I don't usually stay there," she said, "I'm studying for a part in a new movie. I'm gonna be in the sequel to *Women of Brewster Place*. I'm playing Lynn Whitfield's part." I laughed nervously for a moment until Chanikwa gave me a look that made it clear that she didn't approve of my laughter. "I'm Lynn Whitfield and Oprah told me that I have to live here in the projects to prepare for my part. It's *all* about the realness." As we pulled into the parking lot, Chanikwa began yelling, "I'm Lynn Whitfield! I'm Lynn Whitfield!" and then suddenly began singing the chorus to "I'm Every Woman." We were both laughing as she checked the brown paper bag to make sure she had everything before getting out of the car. I told her I'd see her next weekend. She kissed me on the cheek saying, "I'm gonna miss my college boy!" as she got out of my car and swished off to her apartment.

Even though it was "all about the realness," there was nothing "real" about Chanikwa's claim that Oprah Winfrey forced her to live in the projects. Her claim to be studying for a movie role simply emphasized the *potential* for an upper-class identity that Chanikwa knew she could fulfill if only she were given the opportunity. It was a celebration of her inner fierce fish who pees, demanding to be judged on the basis of who she *deserved* to be rather than simply accepting the hand that life had dealt her.

The research presented in this chapter is based on fieldwork conducted in gay bars in Texas in 1993 and 1994. The majority of the research was conducted in The Attic, the Houston bar where Grainger produced drag shows. I spent four months helping with preparations for one of his shows by running various errands and dealing with audio and video equipment. Grainger was still planning the show when I began my research and the

drag queens he introduced me to were eager to help me because they were hoping to get choice parts in the production. Working with me provided access to Grainger and the possibility of convincing me to exert influence in his decisions. Indeed, several drag queens explained their role preferences to me and asked me to talk to Grainger on their behalf.

In addition to the research in Houston, I worked with several drag queens in Austin. The research in both cities involved interviews and recording of public performances and conversations back stage and at rehearsals. Although the analysis presented here draws on additional data, all examples are taken from public performances both to protect the privacy of performers and to highlight the open and public nature of much gay male discourse.

This chapter examines the use of a "white woman" style of speaking among African American drag queens (hereafter AADQs). A close examination of the white woman style suggests an ambivalent, sometimes critical, sometimes angry, view of whiteness that is more complicated than simply "wanting to be white" or "wanting to be a woman." Despite its name, the white woman style often indexes traits associated with social class rather than race or gender. Although the white woman style is based on stereotypes of hegemonically feminine ways of speaking, the use of feminine speech among AADQs regularly involves forms of indexical disjuncture that question normative assumptions about gender, race, and class. This disjuncture includes style-shifting between African American English and the white woman style in ways that clearly distinguish AADQs from actual women, thus highlighting rifts between their language use and their assumed biographical identity. Although the use of the white woman style often

challenges the racism and homophobia experienced by AADQs, drag performances may also index misogynist ideologies, resulting in performances that are highly ambiguous in their relationship to normative gender ideologies.

2.0   Drag

Understanding the use of the white woman style of speaking among AADQs requires an understanding the local meanings of transgender identity held by the AADQs in this study. The meanings of various categories related to drag, cross-dressing, and transgender identity may vary widely across individuals and communities (see Valentine 2007). The understanding of drag presented here reflects the norms among the AADQs I worked with in Texas in the 1990s. Although they may apply to some other situations, they are not meant to convey universal categories that are shared by all individuals.

Figure 2.1: Coco Montrese, Miss Gay America 2010

All of the drag queens in this study are glam queens. They typically go to great lengths to produce a highly feminine image. In addition to wigs, makeup, and "tucking" (hiding one's genitals), drag queens often use duct tape to push their pectoral muscles closer together to give the impression of cleavage. Glam queens almost always wear high-heeled shoes and shave their arms, legs, chest, and (if necessary) back. The dresses worn by glam queens are quite extravagant, often covered in beads or sequins. Many dresses do not have sleeves or have high slits to make it clear that the wearer is not trying to hide masculine features under clothing. Jewelry is almost always worn, especially large earrings and bracelets. The overall goal is to produce an image of extreme femininity that is believable – an image that could pass for a woman. The ideal of glam drag is to be *flawless*, of to have no visual hints of masculinity that could leave one open to being "read" (openly insulted) for failing to present a seamless feminine appearance. Glam queens often compete in beauty pageants, such as Miss Gay America or Miss Gay U.S.A. (see Figure 2.1 and 2.2). These pageants are often included in local gay newspapers, providing important exposure for the winners. Winning pageants also makes it easier to book performances in gay bars, because title holders are more likely to attract customers (compared to other drag queens).

Although in other contexts, the line between drag queens and transgender women may be blurry (e.g. Valentine 2007), the AADQs I worked with in Texas were careful to distinguish themselves from transgender women. They all identified as gay men and emphasized the ability to "pass" as both a man and a woman. One AADQ who came to a rehearsal in makeup was openly mocked by the other AADQs for being in drag out of context and men who actually identified as women were generally viewed negatively.

Within this ideology that emphasized the ability to control both masculinity and femininity, AADQs referred to themselves with masculine pronouns when out of drag and feminine pronouns when in drag.

One popular story in the Houston bar where Chanikwa performed involved an incident in which Chanikwa read another drag queen specifically for being unable to pass as a man. According to the story, Chanikwa was visiting another queen, Coco, when the police came to the door looking for Coco who was suspected of passing stolen checks. In an attempt to hide from the police, Coco (who was very petite) hid under the cushions of the couch as Chanikwa unlocked the door. Chanikwa spread her dress out to hide the lumps created by Coco's presence inside the couch and told the police to come in. Chanikwa pretended not to recognize Coco's name and when the police officer showed her a picture of Coco in full drag, Chanikwa responded by saying, "I'm sorry officer, I don't know her." The police officer then pulled out an old mug shot of Coco out of drag, dressed as a man. Chanikwa replied, "No, officer, I don't know *her* either." The story regularly produced howls of laughter among the bar patrons. The use of *her* to refer to Coco out of drag was a serious insult, suggesting that Coco was unable to pass as a man. Thus, Chanikwa *read* Coco for her inability to produce a masculine self-presentation and Coco was unable to respond without revealing herself to the police and being arrested. The story demonstrates the importance of controlling a range of gender performance among AADQs, for whom a failure to control masculinity was just as embarrassing as a failure to produce a flawless image of femininity.

The drag queens in this study all worked as professional entertainers in gay bars, although their work as drag queens did not provide sufficient income and most had other

forms of employment. In order to become a professional, a drag queen must achieve a certain degree of exposure, usually by working without pay or by winning beauty pageants. A professional drag queen must prove that she is sufficiently flawless. Drag queens who are not flawless may be viewed as *messy*, lacking professionalism both in the image produced and in the demeanor presented in the bar. Thus, a *messy* queen is often one who is unsuccessful at presenting an image of "proper" femininity (both in speech and poise). The term *messy* may also be used for queens who cause problems by spreading gossip or getting into trouble through drugs, alcohol, theft or prostitution. A messy queen has little chance for success as a professional performer because she is unable to convey a convincing image of femininity both on stage and during interactions in the bar.

Figure 2.2: Zhane Kennedy, Miss Gay Louisiana 2010

Feminist scholars have traditionally argued that drag is inherently a misogynistic act, primarily because it represents a mockery of women or, at the very least, a highly stereotyped image of femininity and womanhood (Ackroyd 1979; Frye 1983; Lurie 1981; Raymond 1994, 1996; Williamson 1986). It has been argued that drag is a way of reinforcing a performer's masculinity by demonstrating that he is not actually a woman but that he is able to control the qualities associated with women (Gilbert 1982; Showalter 1983). Because the goal of glam drag is to produce an outward appearance indistinguishable from that of a "real" woman, humor in the performance of glam drag is not derived from the performer's inability to "be" a woman, but from the virtuoso performance itself.

The argument that drag is primarily a mockery of women relies on the stereotyped perception of drag queens displaying "bit tits, fat tummies, wobbly hips and elaborate hair-dos" (Williamson 1986:48) that "draw hoots and howls in audiences of mostly men" (Raymond 1996:217). With the exception of elaborate hairstyles, this stereotyped image of drag has very little to do with the reality of the gay drag performances included in this study. The drag performers here did not intend to produce laughter through their appearance. These sorts of arguments against drag often confuse gay drag queens with the sort of transvestite shows produced by straight (usually white and wealthy) mean as a sort of male bonding experience, even though the latter (often including hairy men wearing exaggerated false breasts and rear ends) are quite different in both content and intent.

Responses to drag since the emergence of queer theory (e.g. Butler 1990, 1993; Feinber 1996; Fleischer 1996; Hilbert 1995) have critiqued the misogynistic interpretation of drag not only because it views all forms of transgender behavior as male homosexual

activities, but also because it places women at the center of male homosexuality. These scholars argue that drag is not "about" women, but rather about the inversion or subversion of traditional gender roles. This approach often praises drag queens for demonstrating that gender displays do not necessarily correlate with anatomical sex and typically see drag as a highly subversive act that deconstructs traditional assumptions concerning gender identity. Butler, for example, argues that drag exposes the imitative nature of gender, showing that gender is an "imitation without an origin" (1990:138). Rather than viewing drag as an imitation of women, queer theorists usually glorify it as a highly political deconstructive force working to undermine gender assumptions. As RuPaul argues, "…my take on drag is all about love, saying that we are *all* drag queens. It's certainly not about putting women down. And it's not about being the butt of a bunch of cheap dick jokes" (1995:181).

Part of the fascination with drag is its ability to cause such diverse reactions in different contexts with different audiences. In some instances, cross-dressing is used as a weapon of misogyny and even homophobia. In other contexts, drag may serve to question the rigidity of prescriptive gender roles, acting as a tool of liberation. One of the main functions of drag performance is to expose the disjuncture between perceived or performed identity and underlying "authentic" biographical identity. The "meaning" of drag is often created by audience members in their individual attempts to reconcile their physical perceptions of the performance with their personal assumptions concerning social identity and gender categories. Many drag queens argue that they are not really trying to "achieve" any great social message but are merely expressing their personal identity (which happens to involve gender crossing).

The celebration and even glorification of drag by queer theorists such as Butler might be seen as exploiting drag queen identity for the sake of theoretical deconstruction of gender categories. Like the feminist view of drag as inherently misogynistic, the view of drag as inherently subversive imposes a one-dimensional meaning on the personal identity of a particular group. There are, however, certainly cases in which drag queen performances are clearly misogynistic. As Miss Understood, a New York drag queen, argues, "I think that men in general are pretty misogynist. Men are sexist all the time and if drag queens are men, of course there's going to be sexist things coming out of their mouths" (Fleisher 1996:32). Although drag queens may be misogynistic at times, their personal identity as drag queens does not make them *de facto* sexists. In many cases, they may be viewed as highly subversive. Neither the view of drag as inherently subversive nor as inherently misogynistic is "correct." Rather, drag queens are individuals whose social identity no more determines their political stance than any other aspect of their personal identity, such as gender, class, or ethnicity. Indeed, the performances by AADQs presented here generally focus on other aspects of identity (such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, and class) rather than on the issue of cross-dressing itself.

2.1   Polyphony and identity

Indexical markers of categories such as gender, class, and ethnicity are often enmeshed in very complex ways, with individuals indexing normative assumptions about the relationship between language and identity to position themselves in relation to dominant language ideologies (e.g. Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 2005). Given the complexity of indexical meanings, expressions of gender are simultaneously expressions of ethnicity (e.g. Bucholtz 1995, Hall 1995) and of class (e.g. Bucholtz 1999, McElhinny 1995,

Woolard 1995). The concept of a prescriptive norm of "women's language" is often a reflection of ideology concerning not only gender, but also race and class.

Given the complex relationship between linguistic form and ideologies of gender, class, and ethnicity, one would expect speakers to attune their linguistic performances to their personal stance toward gender ideologies (in addition to other ideologies of identity). Speakers may heighten or diminish linguistic displays that index various aspects of their identity according to the context of an utterance and the specific goals they are trying to achieve (e.g. Bucholtz and Hall 2004, Podesva 2006). As such, speakers do not necessarily have a single "identity" but rather something closer to what Kroskrity (1993:206 ff) has called a "repertoire of identity," in which any of a multiplicity of identities may be foregrounded at a particular moment. In addition, at any given moment speakers may also convey more than one particular "categorical" identity. For these reasons, linguistic expressions of identity are always *polyphonous* in that they are multivoiced or heteroglossic in the sense of Bakhtin (1981, 1984). Thus, speakers may index a polyphonous, multilayered identity by using linguistic variables with indexical associated to more than one social category. Speakers may also use linguistic variables to index permanent traits or interactional stances that do not necessarily correlate with the assumptions about identity inherent in normative language ideologies. In the case of AADQs, speakers typically use language to simultaneously index their identities as African Americans, as gay men, and as drag queens. Through style shifting, the linguistic variables associated with different aspects of identity may co-occur, creating a voice simultaneously associated with several identity categories (Barrett 1998).

One important distinction between the language of drag queen performances and many other forms of language is that although drag queens use language to index "female" gender, they do not generally see themselves as "women." Thus, they performatively assert an identity (as a "woman") that they may see as distinct and separate from their own biographical identity. Sociolinguistic theory has not traditionally made a distinction between a performed identity and those identities associated with the social categorization of the self. In her analysis of drag, Butler (1990) points out that, in addition to the traditional distinction made between sex and gender, drag creates the need for a third category of gender performance. Although gender performance often corresponds directly with gender identity, cases such as drag require an understanding that performed identity may differ from self-categorized gender identity. Indeed, perhaps the strongest distinction between drag queens and transsexuals is the distinction between performance and identity, in that transsexuals typically maintain a gender identity that corresponds to their gender performance (but may not correspond to their anatomically assigned sex), whereas the gender performance of drag queens typically does not correspond to either gender identity or anatomical sex.

In identity performance, out-group stereotypes concerning the behavioral patterns of the group associated with the performed identity are likely to be more important than actual behavior or the group's own behavior norms (Hall 1995). Audience assumptions and expectations may crucially help to coconstruct a performance that successfully conveys a particular identity regardless of the accuracy of the linguistic performance when compared to the behavior of "authentic" holders of the identity in question (Preston 1992).

Thus, the language used in a performed identity is likely to differ from the actual speech

of those who categorize themselves as having that identity.

As AADQ performances are judged (by audiences and other AADQs) on the basis

or *realness*, or the ability to pass as a "real" woman, the performance must plausibly lead

(usually straight) outsiders to assume that the performer is anatomically female. Any

response (whether reinforcement, rejection or simply acknowledgment) from actual

women is unimportant in the creation of a successful performance. What matters most is

the response of other gay men and drag queens, who base their judgments not on the

actual behavior of women, but rather on stereotyped assumptions concerning "feminine"

behavior. The performer also bases her performance on these stereotypes, so that

performances may reflect the misogynist attitudes and sexist assumptions inherent in the

gender ideology held by the performer.

3.0   AADQ language

3.1   Language ideology

Among AADQs, a *flawless* gender performance is one that cannot be *read* in that it

is not open to criticism because of rifts in feminine appearance or demeanor. Things like

uneven breasts, wigs worn improperly, a bad tuck, visible bra straps or panty lines are

easily *read* as flaws in drag performance. The emphasis on being *real* in drag culture

applies not only to the production of a realistic and believable performance of femininity,

but also to maintaining an honest, "authentic" presentation of the self. Actual deception

about one's anatomical sex is considered particularly *messy*, as it opens up the possibility

of dangerous consequences, particularly violence at the hands of straight men angry at

being duped by a drag queen. A lack of honesty about one's identity as a drag queen can

open one up to being *read* by others just as easily as a flawed performance of femininity. This includes being open and honest about one's sexuality as well as one's gender. Secrecy about one's biographical identity inevitably leads to others knowing your *tea*, a drag term referring to secrets, particularly being in the closet. The term *tea* is most likely related to the term *tea room* (Humphreys 1970), a term referring to public restrooms where men have clandestine sexual encounters with one another. The speech event of *serving up tea* involves making someone else's secrets public as a form of spreading gossip (that is assumed to be true). To *have her tea* means to know the truth about another drag queen's behavior, particularly when revealing the truth would have devastating consequences for the drag queen in question.

A drag queen that is truly *flawless* is able to *throw shade*, or intimidate other drag queens simply through the *fierceness* of her performance of femininity. One may also emit *shade* by having enough of another drag queen's *tea* that she would not criticize for fear of having her tea served up to everyone in the bar. Shade is the result of an exceptional gender performance that speaks for itself without overt comment. Thus the act of throwing shade does not require any direct speech so that an AADQ can emit fierceness without proclaiming one's own flawlessness or reading the flaws of others.

A flawless gender performance that indexes traits associated with class and sophistication avoids both being read and providing others with tea, as long as a drag queen makes no pretense at being a real woman (or even desiring to be a woman). Although drag performances depend on the production of a "real" feminine speech style that might sound convincing to someone who did not know that the performer is anatomically male, the success of drag is also depending on making the audience aware

that this performance is indeed "false" in some sense (that is, the audience must be reminded that the performer is biologically male). Because a successful drag performance is one in which the audience accepts that the performer could pass as a woman, the audience must be occasionally reminded that the performer is indeed *performing* rather than actually claiming a female identity. Thus, although glam queens present an external image of exaggerated femininity, they also use indexical disjunctures to undermine otherwise feminine identity. For example, drag queens frequently use a stereotypically "feminine" speaking style, but a stereotypically "masculine" voice may break through during the performance, creating a polyphonous and often ambiguous performed identity.

This use of indexical disjuncture is illustrated in the example below. Here, the AADQ is just beginning her performance. She begins the performance using the typical white woman style, but quickly shifts into African American English and references the fact that she is biologically male.

1)

1	I feel so special to be here. <[hi:ɹ]>
2	I was on my helicopter flying over <[ovɚ]>
3	and I saw all the cars and I said,
4	"Drop me, mother fucker." <[mʌðə fʌkə]>
5	and here I am. Land and roll.
6	Another quick one.
7	I ain't gonna let him give me razor bumps.
8	That hair right here <[hɛɹ rajt hi:ɹ> (pulling hair forward over neck)
9	People turn back to they white friends,
10	"Oh my gosh, she got chicken nuggets all over her face"

In this example, the white woman style is used in the first three lines. The speech is marked with supercorrect pronunciation. For example, the words *here, helicopter, and cars* are all produced with a clearly articulated [r] and the word *flying* is produced with a

final [ŋ] rather than the [n] usually found in casual speech. In line four, she shifts to low

pitch and changes the style of pronunciation, producing both *mother* and *fucker* without a

final [r]. She shifts back in the following line, producing *here* with the final [r] and

returning to higher pitch. The utterances in line five both occur with a final high (question)

intonation associated with some forms of white femininity. In line seven, she returns to an

African American English style of speaking, suggesting that she had to roll away from the

helicopter quickly in order to avoid getting razor bumps. Razor bumps (pseudofolliculitis

barbae) result from ingrown hairs caused by shaving. For African American men with

coarse beards, razor bumps may be a serious problem. For AADQs, the presence of razor

bumps reveals the presence of facial hair and prevents the possibility of a flawless gender

performance. In line eight, the performer jokes about pulling her hair forward over her

cheeks to hide her razor bumps. The example concludes by quoting the white reaction to

the razor bumps (in which the white observer seems unaware of the problem of razor

bumps and assumes that they are 'chicken nuggets'). The final line in the example occurs

in a mock white voice that is distinguished from the white woman style through the use of

breathy voice, extended vowels and exaggerated intonation. The shift from riding in a

helicopter to having "chicken nuggets all over her face" also highlights the ways in which

social class is tied to aspects of AADQ identity. Although she may present an outward

image of a wealthy woman with a private helicopter, she reveals herself to be a man who

struggles with razor bumps and eats friend chicken from McDonald's.

In this example, the AADQ strategically uses distinct language styles to

simultaneously index distinctive aspects of her identity. The discussion of razor bumps,

produced in AAE, highlights a biographical identity as an African American man and

disrupts the feminine performance introduced at the beginning of the performance. The occurrence of these types of indexical disjunctures is characteristic of AADQ speech both on stage and in casual speech.

Instances in which AADQs index male biographical identity through rhetorical devices associated with both camp (Isherwood 1947; Sontag 1964, Cleto 1999, Harvey 2000, 2002) and singifyin(g) (Abrahams 1976; Gates 1988; Mitchell-Kernan 1972; Smitherman 1977). The rhetorical devices associated with camp include exaggerated femininity and the widespread use of indexical disjunctures. In signifying, a rhetorical form typically found in African American communities, the full intended meaning of an utterance does not rest solely on referential meaning. Rather, an utterance is valued because of its ability to index an ambiguous relationship between the signifier and the signified. Thus the signifier does not simply correspond to a particular concept but indexes a rhetorical figure or skill at verbal art. In signifying, a speaker draws attention to language itself, particularly to her or is skill at using language creatively. Specific attention to language (rather than referential content) may be created through a variety of devices, including the creation of polysemy or ambiguity, the creative use of indirection (Morgan 1991), and the contrastive use of a particular style (Morgan 1999). Signifying relies on the listener's ability to connect the content of an utterance to the context in which it occurs and specifically to sort through the possible meanings and implications of an utterance and realize both the proper meaning and the skill of the speaker in creating multiple potential meanings.

Although the actual forms of camp and signifying are usually quite different, the two rhetorical forms both rely on a speaker's ability to produce indexical polysemy

through forms of language use that index alternative language ideologies. Both camp and

signifying may involve citations of language structure (see Gates 1988 on signifying;

Harvey 2002 on camp). Given this overlap, performances by AADQs may be difficult to

categorize specifically as forms of camp or forms of signifying. Rather, tropes associated

with both sets of rhetorical strategies (that is both camp and signifying) are open to

interpretation according to normative language ideologies within both African American

communities (signifying) and gay communities (camp).

Highly effects instances of camp/signifying are often picked up and repeated by

other drag queens for use in their own performances. Example 2) represents a routine that

was once widely used by a number of different AADQs in Texas:

2) Drag queen: Everybody say "Hey!"
   Audience   "Hey!"
   Drag queen: Everybody say "Ho!"
   Audience: "Ho!"
   Drag queen: Everybody say "Hey! Ho!"
   Audience: "Hey! Ho!"
   Drag queen: "Hey! How y'all doin?

This example draws on the form of a call-response routine, a rhetorical trope often

associated with African American sermons and used regularly in AADQ performances.

The example relies on the polysemy of the word *ho* as both an "empty" word frequently

used in call-response routines by drag queens and as an equivalent of *whore.* After leading

the audience into the chant and getting them to yell "Hey! Ho," the drag queen reinterprets

the word *ho*, taking the audience's chanting of *ho* as a vocative. The polysemy is

dependent on the connection between the utterance and the context and although the form

of the routine operates as signifying (through its use of indirection and the reworking of

the traditional African American trope of call-response), it also reflects the ways in which citations of language form (such as puns) are used in camp forms of language.

3.2 Ideologies of gender, ethnicity and class

Marjorie Garber (1992) notes that there is a long tradition of simultaneous movement across lines of both gender and race/ethnicity. For AADQs, the move to perform female gender is often accompanied by a simultaneous movement across lines of race and class. Sometimes an AADQ will openly state that she is actually white. In one case, for example, an AADQ told two white audience members that she was white just like they were, except that she could "afford more suntan." The Lady Chablis, a Savannah drag queen made famous in John Berendt's (1994) *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, regularly refers to herself as a "white woman" Berendt describes one of their performances as follows: "'I am not what I may appear to be' she will say with apparent candor, adding, 'No, child, I am a heterosexual white woman. That's right, honey. Do not be fooled by what you see. When you look at me, you are lookin' at the Junior League. You are lookin' at an uptown white woman, and a pregnant uptown white woman at that" (Berendt 1996:14). As a "pregnant uptown white woman," The Lady Chablis moves from being a gay African American who is biologically male and from a working-class background, to being upper-class, white heterosexual and female. In her autobiography, The Lady Chablis refers to herself and a close circle of friends as the Savannah League of Uptown White Women (or SLUWW). SLUWW was formed "to honor the belief that all of us is entitled to spend our days sitting up under hairdryers, going to lunch, and riding around town shopping – *all at somebody else's expense"* (1996: 173 original emphasis). She defines an "uptown white woman" as "the persona of a classy, extravagant, and

glamorous woman – big car, big rings, etc." adding parenthetically, "(*This term can be used for all women regardless of color*)" (1996:175; original emphasis). The term *white woman* refers primarily to a class rather than an ethnic distinction and collapses the categories of "real" women and 'drag queens'. Thus each of us has the potential to become an "uptown white woman," no matter what our sexual, racial, ethnic, or gender identity may be. Instead of suggesting a category based on sex or raced, *white woman* in AADQ culture indexes a prevailing ideology of gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity that enforces a particular view of what constitutes "femininity" in the United States.

The combination of particular identity stances (white, rich, female and heterosexual) works to produce a cultural conception of what constitutes the feminine ideal. This ideal femininity is often associated with the idea of being a "lady." As Esther Newton (1979:127) notes, "Most female impersonators aspire to act like 'ladies,' and to call a woman a 'lady is to confer the highest honor." The white woman style of speech as sued by AADQs represents a stereotype of the speech of middle-class white woman, of how to talk "like a lady." This stereotype is closely tied to Robin Lakoff's notion of "women's language" (WL) which also depicts a stereotype of white middle-class women's speech, a fact that Lakoff herself recognized (2004). Lakoff's description of WL captures a pervasive hegemonic notion of gender-appropriate language (see Bucholtz and Hall 1995, Bucholtz 2004). Because it is such a strong symbol of idealized femininity, WL is a powerful tool for performing feminine identity. For example, Lilian Glass (1992) reports that she used Lakoff's (2004) *Language and Woman's Place* in speech therapy with a male-to-female transsexual to produce gender-appropriate language use. Similarly,

Jennifer Anne Stevens (1990) present many of the features of WL in her guidebook for male-to-female transgender production of a "feminine" voice.

Because of the power of WL as a stereotype of how middle-class white women talk (or "should talk), I will use it as the basis for discussing the white woman style of AADQ speech. Here, my use of the term *white-woman style* is intended to reflect this stereotyped representation rather than the real behavior of any actual white women.

Lakoff summarizes the main characteristics of WL as follows:

1. Women have a large stock of words related to their specific interests, generally relegated to them as "woman's work": *magenta...dart* (in sewing), and so on.
2. "Empty" adjectives like *divine, charming, cute*.
3. Question intonation where we might expect declaratives: for instance, tag questions ("It's so hot, isn't it?") and rising intonation is statement contexts ("What's your name dear?" "Mary Smith?")
4. The use of hedges of various kinds. Women's speech seems in general to contain more instances of "well," "y'know," "kinda," and so forth.
5. Related to this is the intensive use of "so." Again, this is more frequent in women's than men's language.
6. Hypercorrect grammar: Women are not supposed to talk rough.
7. Superpolite forms: Women don't use off-color or indelicate expressions; women are the experts at euphemism.
8. Women don't tell jokes.
9. Women speak in italics [i.e. betray the feat that little attention is being paid to what they say] (2004:137)

Of these nine elements of WL, AADQs utilize only the first six. Several of these, such as the use of precise color terms, "empty" adjectives and intensive "so," overlap with stereotypes of gay male speech. However, AADQs regularly distinguish between the two styles. For example, the "empty" adjectives in the gay-male style of speaking are characteristically "gay," such as *flawless, fierce, fabulous,* and so on. In the white woman style, the empty adjectives are more similar to those discussed by Lakoff.

The white woman style among AADQs involves the use of careful, "standard" English phonology and grammar. In other words, in the white woman style, AADQs use

"correct" prescriptive pronunciations as opposed to phonological features stereotypically associated with AAE. This white woman style is the most common speaking style among AADQs and the ability to use this style is considered vital to the success of AADQ performances. For example, in describing one drag queen who was considered exceptionally beautiful but did not control standard English, my friend Grainger explained that he had told her that she could lip-sync all she wanted, but that otherwise she should just keep her mouth shut because "she is *not* white woman." The use of the white woman style also distinguishes AADQs from other African American gay men, who may use either African American English or standard English, but do not typically perform the exaggerated stereotype of white women's speech. Thus, the white woman style functions both to index stereotypes of white femininity and to construct a unique drag queen identity that appropriates and reworks the symbols associated with idealized femininity.

The use of the white woman style thus indexes idealized stereotypes of personal traits associated with middle-class white women, including wealth, sophistication and control over working-class men. Most of the AADQs in this study held retail or service jobs in which their everyday contacts with white women involved socially stratified interactions in which they were expected to cater to the needs of wealthy white women. The everyday interactions between AADQs (out of drag) the wealthy white women they serve often involve forms of implicit or explicit racism and always involve wide differences in power. Being able to afford the wigs, makeup and clothes required for their performances often depends on the tips or sales commissions earned through acknowledgement of the status assumed by their wealthy white women customers. The repetition of these experiences provides a set of performative citations in which the

stereotype of white women's speech represented by WL is indexically associated with higher social status and an assumption of entitlement.

4.0   Performing polyphonous identity

Although the use of the white woman style of speaking is closely tied to ideals of expected feminine behavior, AADQs do not use it exclusively. If such speakers actually wanted to be white, one would expect them to use white women's speech in an attempt to gain the social standing afforded to white women. Frequently, however, they use the white woman style as a type of dialect opposition (Morgan 1999) in which this style is contrasted with other styles of speaking, primarily AAE, to highlight social difference. In the examples presented here, the white woman style is typically used to create indexical polysemy through dialect opposition. Although the white woman style is a crucial marker of AADQ identity, the examples demonstrate that it is not a reflection of a desire to be white. Rather, the white woman style is used to create specific personas and shifting identities throughout the course of a performance, often interrogating hegemonic assumptions about race and class. As in example one, additional stylistic choices (such as stereotypical gay male speech or forms of AAE) are used to "interrupt" the white woman style, highlighting the creating of a performed identity that may not correspond to the assumed biographical identity of the performer.

As noted earlier, AADQs do not adopt the last three characteristics of WL (avoiding off-color expressions, not telling jokes, and speaking in italics). Although all of the features of WL are related to "acting like a lady," these last three are perhaps the most important keys to "ladylike" behavior. Lakoff notes that they may indicate that women realize "that they are not being listened to" (1975:56). One major difference between the

"ladylike" behavior represented by WL and the behavior of AADQs is that "ladies" do not make themselves the center of attention, whereas drag queens often do little else. AADQs sometimes flaunt the fact that they do not meet the standard of proper middle-class women's behavior by using obscenities strategically. In example 3), a drag queen points out that she is not supposed to use words like *fuck* and *shit*, accentuating the fact that she deviates from the prescribed linguistic behavior of middle-class white women:

3) Are you ready to see some muscles? [audience yells]…Some dick?
Excuse me I'm not supposed to say that.
…words like that in the microphone.
Like shit, fuck, and all that, you know?
I am a Christian woman.
I go to church.
I'm *always* on my knees.

The statement *I'm always on my knees* is an instance of signifying through the use of polysemy. In the context of the utterance, it suggests that the speaker prays all the time. Because it is spoken by a drag queen in a gay bar, however, it also insinuates that she frequently performs oral sex on other men. The failure to have an ideal "ladylike" way of speaking (the use of obscenities) is paralleled in the failure to have appropriate "ladylike" sexual behavior. Here, the white woman style co-occurs with obscenities that suggest the "falseness" of the performed white woman identity By creating two contrasting voices within a single discourse, the performer plays off of the disjuncture between performed ("female") and biographical ("male") identity.

In example 4), a Texas AADQ moves from speaking fairly standard English in a high-pitched voice to using an exaggerated low-pitched voice to utter the phrase *Hey what's up home boy* to an African American audience member. This particular monologue occurred in an Austin gay bar with a predominantly white clientele. The switch serves to

reaffirm the fact that the AADQ is African American and biologically male while simultaneously creating a sense of solidarity with the audience member to whom it is addressed. (Note: a *butt-fucking tea* is anything that is exceptionally good.)

4) Please welcome to the stage our next dancer.
   He is a butt-fucking tea, honey.
   He is *hot*. Masculine, muscled, and ready to put it to ya, baby.
   Anybody in here (.) hot (.) as (.) fish (.) grease?
   That's pretty hot, idn't it?
   (Switches to exaggerated low pitch) Hey what's up, home boy?
   (Switches back to high pitch) I'm sorry that fucking Creole always come
   around when I don't need it.
   Please welcome (.) hot, gorgeous, sexy (.) very romantic
   and he'd like to bend you over and turn you every which way but loose.

The speaker apologizes with *that fucking creole always come around when I don't need it,* but the word *creole* is pronounced with a vocalized /l/, and the verb *come* is spoken without the standard English /+s/ inflection. Thus, in apologizing for her use of African American English (or "creole"), she continues to include features characteristic of African American English in her speech (just as the apology for using an obscenity in example 3) involved the continued use of obscenities). The helps shape the statement as a form of signifying by implying that what is spoken does not really convey the full meaning of the utterance. The speaker's continued use of African American English suggests that she has no intention of actually switching totally into standard English (or of totally giving in to the performed white woman identity symbolized by that variety of English).

In other cases, the use of different speech styles may index social context rather than aspects of speaker identity. In the following example, an AADQ discusses the use of rat traps in three different Houston neighborhoods. In example 5), the linguistic choices mirror the content of her speech by indexing the social attributes typically linked to the neighborhoods in question:

5)
1   OK! What we're gonna talk about is, um, rat traps, um.
         [holds up mouse trap]
2   This is a rat trap from <name of upper class white neighborhood> (L*H)
3   It's made by BMW. It's real compact (L*H)
4   It's, thank you. [audience cheers].
5   It's really good (L*H) It's very convenient and there's insurance on it.
6   And this is from <name of upper class white neighborhood> (L*H)
7   OK, now for <name of housing project>
         [holds up large rat trap]
8   This rat trap is made by Cadillac. It's a big (H*) mother fucker.
         [holds up gun]
9   Now for <name of inner city area>
10   You just don't need (H*) no rat trap.
11   Cause those mother fuckers look like dogs (H*) out there.
12   Shit!
13   I put in a piece of cheese, the mother fucker told me,
14   "Next time put in some dog (H*) food."

In this example, the AADQ uses the white woman style in lines 1-6, when discussing the

use of rat traps in an upscale white neighborhood. In addition to supercorrect

pronunciation, she uses final L*H intonational contours repeatedly. The L*H contour

involves a sharp drop in pitch followed by a quick rise to higher pitch. The use of L*H

was an indexical marker of the "Valley Girl" stereotype in the 1980s and came to be

associated with the speech of women in college sororities and, ultimately, young wealthy

white women more generally (see McClemore 1991). In line seven, she shifts to an

African American English style as she begins to discuss rat traps in the predominantly

African American neighborhoods. The use of obscenities (such as the repetitions of

mother fucker in lines 8, 11, and 13) makes a sharp distinction from the proper "ladylike"

speech used in discussing the wealthy neighborhood. The switch is also marked by a

change from the L*H intonation pattern to using a single high pitch accent in the middle

of each sentence. While the sentences in the white woman style end with high pitch, the

other sentences end with final low tone. Here, the shifts in language style correspond to

shifts in the topic of the discourse, highlighting the indexical associations between linguistic varieties, assumptions regarding social class and the spatial contexts (chronotypes) associated with different Houston neighborhoods.

Unlike the previous examples, example 6) is not typical of AADQ performances. I include it here because it deals with a complex set of issues revolving around white stereotypes of African Americans. This example occurred in a bar with an almost exclusively African American clientele, where I was the only white man in the audience. The monologue uses the white woman style in acting out a potential attack on a rich white woman by an African American man. Acting out the rape of any woman is a misogynistic act; yet although this misogyny should not be excused, it is important to note that the main impetus for this piece of data is anger concerning the myth of the African American rapist. As Angela Davis has point out (1983), fraudulent charges of rape have historically been used as excuses for the murder (especially by lynching) of African American men. Because it is based on the racist stereotype of African Americans as having voracious sexual appetites, the myth of the African American rapist operates under the false assumption that rape is a primarily sexual act (and not primarily an act of violence). The myth assumes that all African American men are desirous of white women and are willing to commit acts of violence in order to feed this desire. The fact that this assumption has no basis is especially heightened in the context of African American gay men, who may not be desirous of *any* women. Nevertheless, the patrons of the bar must continuously deal with the ramifications of the myth of the African American rapist, including unfounded white fears of violence. Lines 1 through 21 present the "attack" on the white woman, in which the AADQ, in interaction with a male audience member who assists in the scene,

uses the white woman style alternating with African American English as she moves in

and out of the persona of a white woman:

6)   1   I'm a rich white woman in <name of wealthy white neighborhood>
      2   and you're going to try to come after me, OK?
      3   And I want you to just…
      4   I'm going to be running, OK?
      5   And I'm gonna fall down, OK? OK?
      6   And I'm just gonna…look at you…
      7   and you don't do anything.
      8   You hold the gun… [hands a toy gun to audience member]
      9   Goddamn – he got practice. [audience laughter] <obscured>
      10   I can tell you're experienced.
[The audience member holds the gun, but so that it faces down, not
as if he were aiming it]
      11   OK hold it.
      12   You know you know how to hold it, don't play it off…
      13   Hold that gun…Shit…Goddamn…
      14   [Female audience member]: Hold that gun!
      15   That's right fish! Hold that gun! Shit!
      16   OK now, y'all, I'm fish, y'all, white fish witch!
      17   And I'm gonna be running cause three Black men with big dicks
chasing me!
      18   [Points to audience member] He's the leader, OK?
      19   Now you know I gotta fall, I want y'all to say, "Fall bitch!"
      20   Audience: Fall bitch!
[The AADQ falls, then rises, making gasping sounds, alternating with

"bum-biddy-bum" imitations of the type of music used in suspense scenes in movies and

television shows]

      21   Now show me the gun!

[The audience member holds up the gun and the AADQ performs an exaggerated faint]

It is important to note that the man holding the gun does not "do anything" (lines 7-8).

Despite the AADQ's insinuation that he is "experienced" (line 10), the audience member

fails to hold the gun correctly until a woman in the audience yells at him (line 14). The

"white woman" pretends that "Black men with big dicks" are chasing her through the park

(line 17) and faints on seeing the man with the gun (line 21). Thus, the African American

man is basically passive throughout the exchange and the "white woman" reacts primarily based on fears fed by racism.

In the remainder of the segment, the corollary to the myth of the African American rapist is presented, the myth of the promiscuity of the African American woman (Davis 1983:182). In lines 22 through 26, the same scene is acted out with an "African American woman" (speaking primarily in a tough, streetwise "bangee girl" style of AAE) rather than a "white woman." The "African American woman" on seeing the large feet of the man with the gun (which implies he has a large penis as well), consents to having sex with him, saying that the gun is unnecessary (lines 25-26).

22   Now this Black fish…
23   <obscured> Black men's running after her…
24   I ain't no *boy*! Fuck y'all! Fuck y'all mother fuckers!
[AADQ looks at the gun]
25   You don't have to use that baby, I see them size feet.
26   Come on! Come on!

To focus on the inescapable misogyny of this example is to miss its political complexity. The performance also touches all aspects of the myth of the African American rapist, the racist assumptions concerning both the "pure and fragile nature" of white women as "standards of morality" and the "bestial nature" of African American women and men. In this highly political performance, the drag queen moves in and out of the personas of narrator, director, and actor in the drama she is creating. She performs a variety of identities indexed by various linguistic styles to undermine specific stereotypes and prejudices that are all too familiar to her audience.

5.0   Conclusion

These examples from AADQ performances suggest that the use of white women's speech by AADQs cannot be interpreted as simply reflecting a desire to be white. The

femininity associated with speaking like a "white woman" simultaneously indexes a set of class, gender, and ethnic identities associated with the ideology of what constitutes "ideal" feminine behavior. Although the white woman style is sometimes emblematic of status, it is also used in combination with other stylistic choices to highlight a variety of more critical attitudes towards whiteness. Thus the appropriation of aspects of dominant culture need not necessarily indicate acceptance of its dominating force. Rather, this appropriation can serve as a form of resistance (Butler 1993:137). Indeed, in some cases the appropriation of white women's language does succeed in undermining racist and homophobic assumptions associated with the dominant culture. But arguments concerning the misogyny of drag cannot be brushed aside simply because drag is sometimes subversive. Although the examples in this chapter suggest a form of resistance toward racism and homophobia, they do little to call into question the sexism in American society. Drag performances should not be understood simply as "subversive" or "submissive" with regard to hegemonic culture. The polyphony of stylistic voices and the identities they index serve to convey multiple meanings that may vary across contexts and speakers. A full understanding of a phenomenon such as drag requires that we follow the advice of Claudia Mitchell-Kernan's description of signifying and "attend to all potential meaning-carrying symbolic systems in speech events – the total universe of discourse" (1972:166).

Notes:

1. All names are pseudonyms, although the chosen names attempt to reflect the types of name that were typical among the drag queens in my research.

2. Following community norms, I will refer to drag queens with feminine pronouns.

3. For a glossary of slang terms used by gay African Americans in the South, see Johnson 2008.

CHAPTER THREE

"The Faggot God is Here!": Chronotopes in *Ye Faerie Hymnal*

1.0   The Beltane Maypole

Every year on the first of May, hundreds of gay men gather together in rural Tennessee for an annual celebration of Beltane, one of the eight Sabbats (solar holidays) recognized by Neopagan groups such as Wiccans. The celebration occurs at the Short Mountain Sanctuary, a "queer commune" established by members of the radical faeries outside of Liberty, Tennessee. The week-long celebration involves a variety of rituals and spiritual exercises and culminates in dancing around the Maypole. The cultural practices of these radical faeries combine elements drawn from a vast array of cultural origins. The celebration of Beltane (of Celtic origin) and the Maypole (of Germanic origin) are combined with Neopagan spiritual evocations of gods and goddesses appropriated from a variety of cultures, including Sumerian, Egyptian and European religions. The rituals also borrow widely from Native American and Australian Aboriginal cultures. Although there are some recurring rituals like the Maypole ceremony, the cultural practices of radical faeries do not follow strict guidelines or adhere to any single religious tradition, although they tend to have close ties to other Neopagan movements such as Wicca. Individuals may create their own rituals in the moment of celebration, making radical faerie religious practice unique to the spiritual direction experienced by any given individual. Because the radical faerie approach to individual religious and cultural experience challenges traditional understandings of culture, radical faeries have received more attention from

ethnographers than perhaps any other gay male subculture (Hasbrouck 2005, Hennen 2009, Morgenson 2001, 2008; Povinelli 2006, Stover 2008).

Although critics of Christianity often argue that God is a human creation, radical faeries openly accept that the gods and goddesses that they worship are either invented or directly borrowed from other cultures. As a uniquely gay religious identity, radical faeries have grown from a small movement in the late 1970s to a worldwide subculture with *faerie circles* throughout North America and Europe and reaching as far as Japan, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the Philippines and Thailand. As the radical faeries have grown, some regular cultural forms such as art and music have come to be shared across otherwise disparate groups. Some central tenets of fairie culture have also emerged, including an essentialist view of a unique gay male spirituality, utopianism (see Hasbrouk 2005), a romanticized view of rurality (see Morgensen 2008) and anti-urbanism (see Herring 2010) and a commitment to egalitarianism.
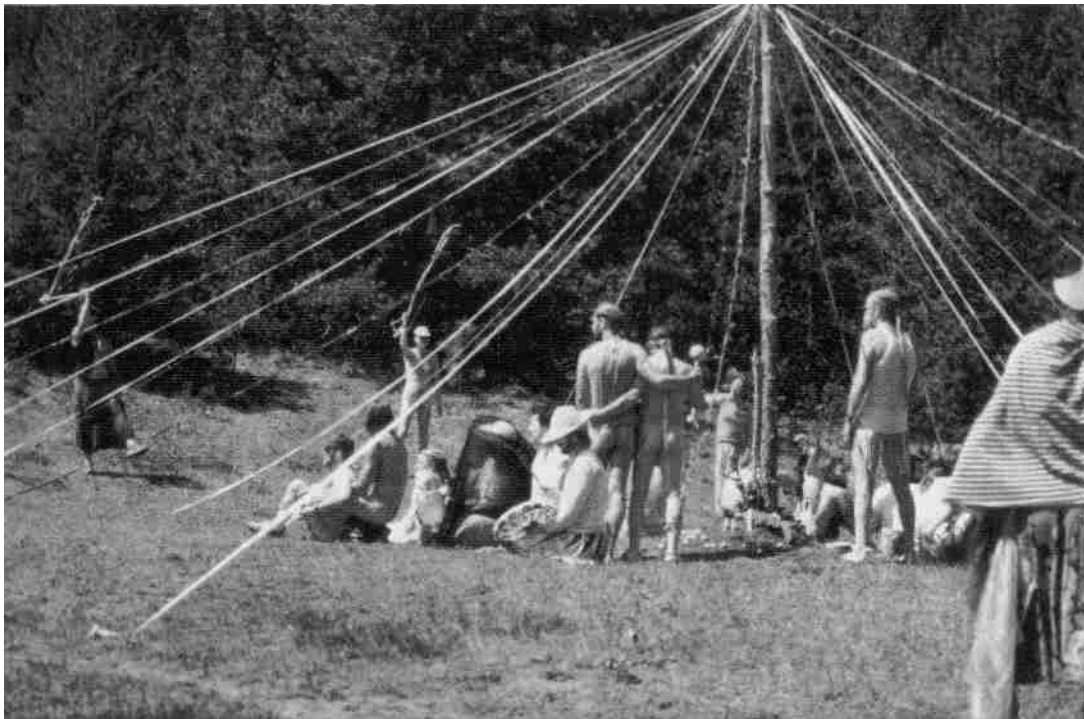
Figure 3.1: A Radical Faerie Maypole

While radical faeries maintain some rituals such as the Maypole, their approach to ritual creates cultural practice in the moment. Individualistic ritual is understood as being free from any prior specific cultural inheritance; spiritual power emerges from individual creativity rather than from following some prescribed set of ritual practices. The self-fashioning of radical faeries is constructed through a bricolage of elements appropriated from other cultures (see Povinelli 2008). Radical faerie identity is closely tied to a very malleable set of "pagan" religious beliefs; the variation in the beliefs of individual faeries is united through an over-arching ideology of neoliberal individualism that emphasizes individual paths toward spiritual enlightenment. These individual paths lead to a unified view of higher consciousness. Radical faeries typically refer to their group identity as a *movement* (rather than a family or community), emphasizing the centrality of spiritual and social change to radical faerie culture.

This chapter examines the language of radical faerie songs and chants in order to analyze the ways in which the widespread appropriation in radical faerie culture serves to construct a uniquely gendered subcultural identity. The chapter begins by discussing the origins of the radical faerie movement and radical faerie religious views, cultural practices and gender ideology. The remainder of the chapter presents an analysis of *Ye Faerie Hymnal* a collection of songs and chants intended for use at radical faerie gatherings. The analysis focuses on the combination of chronotopes associated with different (appropriated and original) songs. As discussed in chapter one, a chronotope is the specific spatial and temporal envelope in which a narrative occurs (Bakhtin 1981, Silverstein 2005). The appropriated elements in radical faerie ritual music are associated with distinct and disparate chronotopes. The disjunctive relationships between these

different chronotopes serve as a discourse resource for the construction of radical faerie identity and gender ideology.

2. Radical faeries

2.1 Radical faerie origins

In 1976, Arthur Evans began a "faery circle" in San Francisco in which gay men met regularly to explore paganism and radical politics. Although the use of *faery* reclaimed the term *fairy* referring to effeminate men in the early 20th century (see Chauncey 1994), the choice was also related to European folk traditions involving actual fairies (that is, the Tinkerbell kind). Harry Hay, one of the founders of the radical faerie movement, was influenced by W. Y. Evans Wentz's (1911) ethnographic study of beliefs involving faeries in Celtic cultures. In particular, Hay was intrigued by the belief that there once existed an actual race of fairies (Timmons 1990: 251). Wentz also noted similarities between Celtic fairy traditions and the religious beliefs of Native Americans, perhaps leading to the *faerie* practice of combining these two seemingly disparate traditions.

About 220 men attended the first radical faerie gathering over Labor Day weekend in 1979 at the Sri Ram Ashram in Benson, Arizona (Timmons 1990:265ff). The gathering involved discussions of spirituality and sexuality and the performance of spontaneous rituals. In the most widely discussed ritual of the gathering, the "mud ritual," about fifty naked attendees began bringing water from the ashram to make mud from the desert dirt. After one of the men laid in the mud with an erection, the other men began packing mud around his penis until they had built a mound of mud over the man. Other attendees circled around them, chanting "om" and began dancing around the man.

(Timmons 1990:267) After this spontaneous ritual, faeries have often been associated with playing naked in mud, but it is not the case that the "mud ritual" is regularly performed or has become a basic part of faerie culture. The mud ritual typifies the ways in which radical faerie ritual practice often emerges "in the moment" rather than following a pre-specified pattern. Although there are certain rituals that are regularly performed on specific occasions (like dancing the Maypole on Beltane), spontaneous and unscripted ritual is highly valued within radical faerie culture.

The development of the radical faeries involved the convergence of a number of distinct social trends in the 1970s. The original founders of the movement, including Hay, had experience in Marxist and socialist political movements in addition to working with gay rights organizations. Hay himself was both an early leader in the Mattachine society (one of the first gay rights organizations in the United States) and an open member of the communist party. These two movements came together in the development of an ideology of gay male egalitarianism that remains a central part of radical faerie culture. In addition, early faeries were closely tied to 1970s radical feminism, in particular drawing on feminist theology and forms of New Age feminism associated with paganism and goddess worship.

The fascination with Native American culture typically associated with the hippie movement was also highly influential in early faerie culture. The understanding of radical faeries as a type of "third gender" was drawn primarily from (then) contemporary understandings of Native American beliefs concerning gender and sexuality. The central role of a rural identity and the rejection of urban society were also closely tied to the social movements of the time, such as the rising environmental movement. In the 1970s,

a distinct gay rural identity was promoted through the publication of *RFD* magazine, originally intended to give a voice to gay men living in rural parts of the United States. As the radical faerie movement gained ground, radical faeries used *RFD* to promote various gatherings and other radical faerie events. Eventually, the magazine came to be associated primarily with the radical faeries themselves; the magazine is now published at the Short Mountain Sanctuary and is often referred to as the "Radical Faerie Digest" (although the name is not official).

Faeries often take special "fairy names" that they use in faerie contexts such as gatherings. These names reflect aspects of faerie culture. This includes highlighting faerie androgyny through the use of feminine names or names that clearly mark gay identity (e.g. Bubbles, Cupcake, and Proudpansy). Names may also index the centrality of nature to faerie spirituality (e.g. Raven, Heron, Willow). There are also names referencing membership in other subcultures (e.g. Leatherfaerie, Fairybear). Other names index the various religious traditions brought together by radical faeries or general Neopagan traditions (e.g. Orion, Kali, Starchild). Some faeries use names taken from Native American languages. Many names combine these various indexical associations, like Rainbowtoad or Mugwort (a medicinal herb used by some Native Americans in sweatlodge ceremonies).

2.2   Gender ideology in radical faerie culture

Although radical faerie culture privileges the spontaneous and individualistic, two basic aspects of faerie culture are typically cited as central to an otherwise highly variable faerie identity (see Rodgers 1995: 35, Hennen 2009). These two *core principles* (Rodgers 1995) are an essentialist view of faerie effeminacy (or androgyny) and the idea of

subject-SUBJECT consciousness from the writings of Harry Hay (see Hay 1996). Gender ideology in faerie culture is rooted in these two basic principles.

The essentialist view of faerie effeminacy links faerie identity with spirituality through the appropriation of presumed Native American understandings of a "third gender." Hay was particularly interested in the "berdache" tradition as described in ethnohistorical studies of Native American cultures. Although the term "berdache" is considered offensive today (having been replaced by Two Spirit or other terms), it was the common term in the 1970s when faerie identity began to solidify. The ways in which early anthropologists imagined the "berdache" have also been questioned by contemporary anthropologists (e.g. Brown 1997, Jacobs et al. 1997, Epple 1998, Hall 2003, Giley 2006). In the mid-1970s, Hay moved to New Mexico, hoping to learn more about the *kwidó* (Two Spirit) tradition among the Tewa. However, Hay found little evidence of a contemporary Two Spirit tradition and ultimately based his views of Native American sexuality on historical descriptions and discussions with non-Native anthropologists, particularly Sue Ellen Jacobs (see Hay 1996). Indeed, Hay chastised the local Tewa who identified as gay men because they did not themselves identify as *kwidó* and had little knowledge of the traditions associated with the term (Timmons 1990).

Hay held that gay men should be understood as members of a "third gender" that was naturally (and essentially) androgynous (see Zimman and Hall 2009). Following his understanding of Native American "third genders," Hay felt that members of this third gender had a natural spiritual gift resulting from the presence of both masculine and feminine spirits within a single individual. For Hay, gay men were not actually *men* at all, but were a distinct and separate *species* of *gay not-men* with identities rooted in

androgyny (Hay 1996:246). For radical faeries, this essential androgyny is directly linked to spirituality. As Rodgers argues:

> The concept of Androgyny has been taken on by the Faeries and given a distinctly spiritual bent. Rather than referring to an asexual or omni-sexual state, Androgyny for the Faeries means radically juxtaposing elements of the masculine and feminine in psychological as well as physical formulations. The relationship of the archetype of the Androgyne to figures in myth and history has become a spiritual imperative for many Radical Faeries seeking a tradition to reclaim. (Rodgers 1995:35)

While Hay's interpretation of Native American sexuality is certainly questionable in terms of accuracy, it has been particularly influential in the development of radical faerie identity. Some radical faerie websites include links to Two Spirit groups, perpetuating the idea that the two are related if not equivalent. Although radical faeries do not generally identify as Native American, they maintain the idea of a distinct and innate androgynous (Two Spirit) gender identity intimately linked to spirituality appropriated from Native American cultures. Rather than directly linking themselves to Native American understandings of sexuality, radical faeries link androgynous spirituality to a variety of "Western" cultural forms including drag queens (Rodgers 1995:35) and various Neopagan religious practices. Radical faeries also apprrpiate stereotyped Native American ideologies of nature and the spiritual significance of specific geographic locations (see Morgensen 2001, 2008).

In contrast to the drag queens discussed in the previous chapter, who see gender crossing as highly constructed, radical faerie androgyny is understood as being innate. Hay felt that most gay men, particularly the clones of the 1970s, had lost touch with their natural androgynous identity and had become obsessed with attempted to reproduce forms of heterosexual masculinity. This "hetero-male imitation" was understood as an

unnatural result of living in a homophobic society. Hay urged "Gay Brothers" to "tear off the ugly green frog-skin of Hetero-male imitation in which we had wrapped ourselves in order to get through school with a full set of teeth to reveal the beautiful Fairy Prince hidden beneath" (Hay 1996:254). By rejecting "hetero-male imitation" and embracing their natural innate androgyny, faeries could find their "true" essential spirituality. In describing the first radical faerie gathering, Hay discusses the way in which the attendees came to "reunite" with their inner "sissy-kid":

> The pathways we explored, during our Desert Retreat, to transform ourselves from Hetero-imitating Gays into Radical Fairies were many. Because the old ways of fairy transformation were obliterated during the nightmarish centuries of Judeo-Christian oppression, we felt ourselves free to invent new ones. So…to begin with…
>
> - We reached out to reunite ourselves with the cornered, frightened, rejected little Sissy-kids we all once were;
>
> - We reached out to recapture and restore in full honors that magick of 'being a different species perceiving a different reality' (so beautifully projected almost a century ago by J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*) which may have encapsulated our boyhood and adolescence;
>
> - We told that *different* boy that he was remembered….loved…and deeply respected;
>
> - We told him we now recognized that he, in true paradox, had always been the real source of our Dream, of our strength, again in true paradox, that few Hetero Males can even begin to approach, let alone match;
>
> - We told that beloved little Sissy that we had experienced a full paradigm shift and that he could now come home at last to be himself in full appreciation. Hay 1996:255

Given the androgyny of the "beloved little Sissy," non-normative gender expression is a basic part of radical faerie identity and various forms of drag are a regular part of radical

faerie gatherings. Radical faerie sanctuaries often have a closet of clothing available for guest to dress in drag during their stay (Hennen 2009).

Figure 3.2: Harry Hay at a Radical Faeries Campout
(Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, 1996)

In contrast to the "realness" of glam drag discussed in the previous chapter, actually looking like a woman (or passing) is not a goal of radical faerie drag. The type of drag among radical faeries usually involves a purposefully androgynous look that does not try to mask the fact that one is biologically male. This often involves poorly-fitting dresses (usually purchased at thrift stores) worn by men with beards or visible chest hair. In

contrast to the glam drag discussed in Chapter One, radical faerie drag does not involve false breasts or padded hips and buttocks. It may simply involve wearing women's jewelry or wearing a skirt instead of pants. This type of drag is sometimes referred to as "genderfuck" (Rodgers 1995:35), while the drag queens discussed in Chapter Two usually called it "trash drag". Regardless of the name, radical faerie drag does not emphasize a purely feminine identity, but rather celebrates the androgynous identity central to radical faerie gender ideology.

The second core element of faerie identity, *subject-SUBJECT consciousness*, emerges directly from the writings of Harry Hay. Drawing on radical feminist views of the sexual objectification of women and Marxist views of individuals being treated as economic objects, Hay came to believe that gay men had the unique potential to escape the objectification of other individuals, particularly other gay men. Following his views of "hetero-male imitation", Hay felt that the dominant gay male culture of the 1970s clones (see Martin 1998) had adopted the objectifying ideologies of heterosexual men so that clones treated one another as sexual objects for individual gratification. Hay argued that gay men must learn to escape the sexual and economic objectification practiced by heterosexual men and develop a *subject-SUBJECT consciousness* by coming to recognize their innate gendered spirituality. Hay believed that gay men were inherently able to approach one another as *subjects*, although the cultural dominance of heterosexuality made it difficult to accept and recognize this ability:

> The Hetero monogamous relationship is one in which the participants, through bio-cultural inheritance, traditionally perceive each other as OBJECT. To the Hetero male, woman is primarily perceived as sex-*object* and then, only with increasing sophistication as person-*object*. The Gay monogamous relationship is one in which the participants, through non-competitive instinctual inclinations *and contrary to cultural*

> *inheritances*, perceive each other as Equals and learn, usually through
> deeply painful trials-and-errors, to experience each other, to continuously
> to grow, and to develop *with* each other, *empathically* – as SUBJECT. Hay
> 1996: 210

Hay's *subject-SUBJECT consciousness* serves as the basis for ideology of equality within gatherings and at faerie sanctuaries. The goal of social transformation through nurturing individual spirituality is reflected in the choice to refer to the community of radical faeries as a *movement* (rather than a religion or subculture).

As Hennen's (2009) ethnography of radical faeries demonstrates, the egalitarian ideals of *subject-SUBJECT consciousness* are not always met at radical faerie sanctuaries. Indeed, issues of power and control over leadership have been hotly contested since the early days of the movement. Power struggles include an attempt to oust Harry Hay from his leadership role in the movement through a coup (see Timmons 1990) and a widely-discussed incident in which an early member of the movement threw a bowl of fruit salad at Hay in anger over Hay's control over other founders. This later incident has become a basic part of radical faerie mytho-history, even being referred to as The Sacred Rubbermaid Salad Bowl incident (Kerlick 2009). Hennen also criticizes the idea of *subject-SUBJECT consciousness*, particularly in terms of its assumptions regarding gay male objectification within clone culture (which he argues could just as easily be seen as *object-OBJECT consciousness*).

Although radical faerie culture is often difficult to pin down because of its highly individualistic approach to identity and culture, both the ideal of subject-SUBJECT consciousness and the essentialist view of gay male gender as a type of "third gender" (closely tied to spirituality) repeatedly surface as the basic tenets of radical faerie gender

ideology. These elements of faerie gender ideology present recurring themes in various cultural practices that emphasize spirituality, non-normative gender and egalitarianism.

2.3   Radical faerie spirituality

Within Hay's original understanding of *subject-SUBJECT Consciousness,* Judeo-Christian religious traditions were viewed as oppressive forms of domination over gay men. In addition to open persecution of gay men, Judeo-Christian traditions were seen as perpetuating the gender inequality underlying the objectification of women. As hetero-imitation of this objectification was responsible for the destruction of gay male spirituality, the danger of Judeo-Christian theology goes beyond overt oppression to cause psychological and spiritual damage to the beloved "sissy boys" that may come to identify as radical faeries.

The rejection of Christianity is emphasized through the appropriation of elements from other (non-Christian) traditions. The primary sources of appropriation are Native American traditions, European and Near Eastern traditions that precede the spread of Christianity (particularly Celtic, Norse, Greek, Sumerian, and Egyptian religious traditions). In appropriating from Native American and European pagan traditions, the radical faeries align themselves with cultures that have a history of Christian domination. However, many of the appropriations in radical faerie religious practice overlap with those found in other Neopagan and New Age groups.

Although often linked together, Neopaganism and New Age have distinct theologies and practices. As York (2001: 364) notes, both movements are often accused of narcissism and both "take part in the contemporary spiritual consumer market and

…appropriate spiritual idioms from a range of other traditions." For this reason, some scholars treat Neopaganism as a specific form of New Age religious practice. However, there are important differences between the two in both theology and religious practice. New Age movements believe in an inner god within each individual and therefore emphasize individual paths to higher consciousness and emphasize individualism in religious practice and beliefs. For some New Age believers, the natural word may be seen as a distraction from achieving higher consciousness (York 2001: 366), although specific locations may be seen as holding sacred power (Ivakhiv 2003). In contrast, Neopagans generally view nature as a sacred manifestation, so that one may reach higher consciousness through uniting with the natural world.

Although both movements appropriate widely from other religious traditions, Neopaganism appropriates specifically from pre-Christian European traditions. In contrast, New Age appropriations are taken from a much broader range of cultural and religious traditions (York 2001: 366-7). In exploring possibilities of an individual spiritual journey, appropriation from any religious tradition may be a valid path to higher consciousness. However, New Age appropriations are not entirely unconstrained, as individuals are socialized into the movement so that choices of appropriation are normative and do not necessarily represent arbitrary individual choices from a "spiritual supermarket" (see Aupers and Houtman 2006).

The emphasis on individual spirituality among radical faeries clearly draws on New Age traditions. However, the relationship between inner spirituality and the natural world is not antagonistic and faeries share the Neopagan view of unification with nature as central to enlightenment. Thus, faeries *sanctuaries* are set in rural, natural settings and

may even purposely eschew using electricity or indoor plumbing as a way of coming closer to a 'natural' existence.

Indeed, it is the combination of communion with the natural environment and unity with fellow faeries that makes higher spiritual consciousness possible. By avoiding the distractions of modern heterosexual society, a faerie is able to build spiritual links both between himself and other faeries and between the spiritual forces associated with the appropriated cultural elements that come together in radical faerie ritual practice.

2.4   Faerie cultural practice

Despite radical faerie ideologies of individualism and freedom of spiritual expression, there are numerous cultural practices that have become a regular part of faerie culture. Organized groups of radical faeries are known as *faerie circles*, building on Wicca beliefs about the magical abilities of circles to keep magical power inside a defined space (or group of individuals) and to keep evil forces outside of that same space. Although Wiccans usually refer to organized groups as *covens*, the term *circle* is sometimes used for the same purposes. The *circle* is associated with protection achieved through spiritual unity.

Protection from outside heteronormative society is important in avoiding "hetero-imitation" and creating a safe space to nurture faerie spirituality. *Sanctuaries* like the one in Short Mountain, Tennessee provide such safe spaces and some faeries live in permanent communes on sanctuary lands. Sanctuaries are also the typical location for *gatherings*, regular (often annual) meetings of radical faeries. If not held at a sanctuary, *gatherings* are held at some other outdoor natural location, typically in a forest or desert.

Gatherings may involve specific rituals (often associated with particular pagan holidays) and typically include consciousness-raising activities such as the *heart circle*.

Although ritual practice and proximity to nature may fuel the heightened-consciousness of Hay's original faerie vision, the speech act of the *heart circle* is the central element in efforts to obtain higher levels of awareness. The heart circle is a form of New Age talking circles (see Tavory and Goodman 2009). The practice of talking circles involves organized turns at speaking during which other participants must remain silent. The radical faerie (e-mail) list describes the heart circle as follows:

> Faeries come together in a circle to speak from the heart, and to listen to one another through our hearts. Usually a talisman of some kind (a talking stick, a shawl, a day-glo bubble wand) is used to identify the faerie who is speaking -- as long as that faerie holds the talisman, that faerie speaks, without interruption or feedback, and everyone else listens, with as much attention and compassion as we can muster. In some heart circles the talisman is passed around the circle and each faerie has that opportunity to speak or to pass the talisman. In other circles when one faerie is done speaking, any other faerie may ask for it. Either way, passing the talisman is an intimate exchange, often accompanied by a hug or a kiss.
> Speaking from the heart is difficult to define, but we know when we're doing it, and when we're not. The quality of a heart circle comes as much (or more) from the listening as from the speaking. Many of us have had some or our most deeply emotional, healing, transformative experiences in heart circle.
> (http://www.radfae.org/faerielist/#9a)

The attention to listening in the heart circle reinscribes Hay's *subject-SUBJECT consciousness* by holding that a higher consciousness can be achieved through the solidarity between fellow faeries.

Cultural practices like *gatherings* and *heart circles* reinforce the ideologies of gender identity and social egalitarianism among radical faeries. The remainder of this chapter examines the ways in which these same gender ideologies influence language use in radical faerie music. The analysis examines *Ye Faerie Hymnal*, a collection of music

for use in faeries gatherings. The collection (available from the radical faerie mailing list:

http://www.radfae.org/?page_id=101) includes chants and religious songs as well as

traditional campfire songs that might be used at faerie gatherings.

Figure 3.3: Radical Faeries at London Gay Pride, 2010

2.5   Queer God, Faggot God, Purple God

Although many of the songs in *Ye Faerie Hymnal* are taken from other religious

traditions, a number of the songs are written specifically by and for radical faeries. Some

of these faerie-specific songs involve the Queer God. The Queer God is unique to radical

faeries and is a uniquely queer male deity with attributes that reflect the Neopagan (and

anti-Christian) religious framework of faerie culture. Rogers (1995) describes the Queer

God as follows:

> The Queer God is called by many names - Purple God, Singing Bear, Deep Kisser, He Who Dances. In each of the different aspects the Queer God has a different queer role. . . A god solely for queers can be seen as a creation by the Radical Faeries of a symbol which provides spiritual reassurance, companionship, and protection. Faced with the threats to queer life and lifestyle from circumstances such as AIDS, queer-bashing, and the denial of social acceptance, the Queer God becomes protector, companion and confidante of the Faeries.

The invention of the Queer God reflects the faeries' playful attitude towards religious experience. The Queer God is intended to meet the unique spiritual needs of faeries that are ignored or maligned by other religious traditions. Because Hay felt that radical faeries were gay "not-men," the open-ended definition of *queer* fits with faerie gender ideology better than the androcentric *gay*. Although this use of "queer" predates similar uses of *queer* in Queer Theory, the referent of queer is open-ended and vague, reflecting the ambiguous gender identity asserted in radical faerie theology. In rejecting traditional gender categories and appropriating the concept of Two Spirit identity, radical faeries reject an identity as "men" (and thus and identity as "gay men"). Indeed, only one song in the *Hymnal* ("Onward dykes and faggots") uses the word "gay" in reference to sexual identity:

1) Onward dykes and faggots
   Out into the fray
   Come out to declare we're
   Happy to be gay.

   Our rights have been denied us
   Kept from us too long
   We come out together
   Together we are strong.

In this paradoy of the Christian hymn *Onward Christian Solidiers*, the use of *gay* is clearly tied to gay and lesbian identity politics and the idea of coming out and coming together. Although Hay felt that gay culture was detrimental to gay male spirituality,

many radical faeries are involved in gay politics and radical faeries often participate in celebrations of gay pride (see Figure 3.3).

Despite the existence of links to gay politics, songs in *Ye Faerie Hymnal* are much more likely maintain Hay's original distance from gay identity by using *queer* to index an open-ended gender and sexual identity. An example is in the "Birthday Song" attributed to Washington, DC radical faeries:

2) It's your birthday! Your birthday!
   Your coming to the Earth Day.
   We are so glad that you are here.
   We are so glad that you are Queer.
   We are so glad that you are near to us today. Hey!

Other songs using *queer* to refer to radical faerie identity include a round *Dear friends, queer friends* and *Brothers remembered*, a song calling the spirits of radical faerie brothers together.

As Rodgers notes, the *queer god* is also known by other names. *Ye Faerie Hymnal* also includes examples of *Faggot God* ("The Faggot God is Here" by the Kawashaway North Woods Faerie Tribe) and *purple god.* The chant "Purple God" by Sparky T. Rabbit explicitly equates the *purple god* with the *queer god* ("Purple god, queer god, Come, we call your holy name"). The concepts of the *queer god* or *purple god* allow for an unspecified gender, reinforcing the view of faeries as belonging to some "third gender." Although the *faggot god* indexically marks a male identity, it highlights the emotional pain associated with the "inner sissy boy" that is nurtured through faerie spiritual reflection.

In addition to the *queer god*, radical faeries worship The Horned One, a deity that mixes characteristics of a variety of gods that have been depicted as having horns,

including Dionysus, Cerrunos, and Shiva (Rodgers 1993). Rodgers notes that in

Neopagan practice, The Horned One is the consort of the Goddess and is clearly rooted in

heterosexual masculinity. However, gay pagan writers such as Arthur Evans have argued

that veneration of The Horned One is associated with ancient pagan (Dionysian) rituals

involving ecstatic homosexual rites (see Evans 1978, 1988).
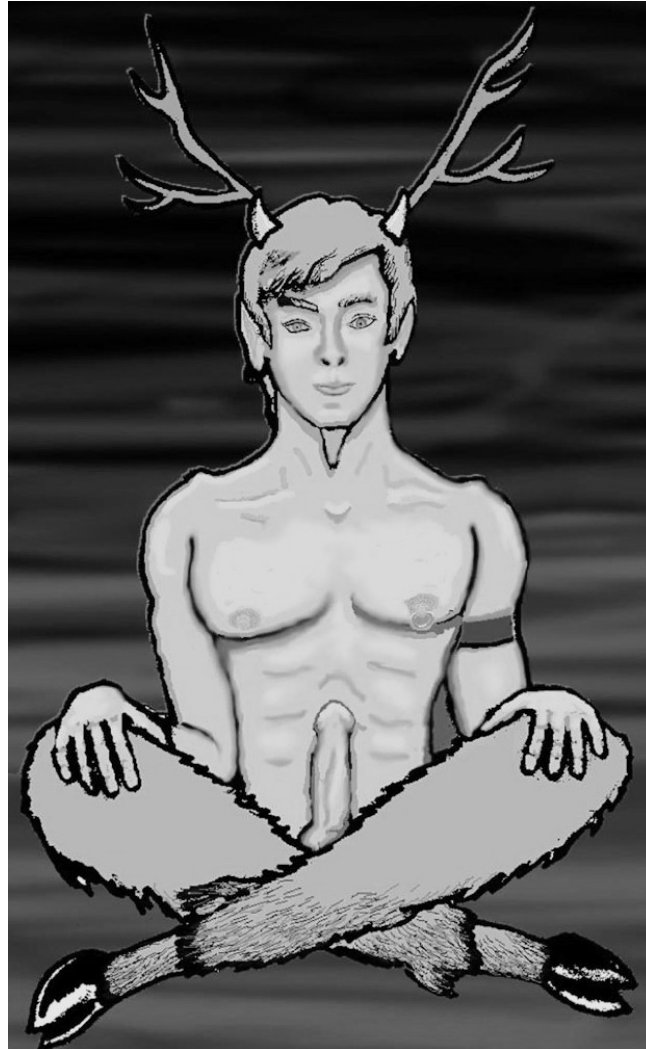
Figure 3.4: The Horned One (from The Brotherhood of Green Men)

Although the faerie view of The Horned One attempts to eradicate the

heterosexuality associated with the deity, The Horned One is still a clearly masculine

deity. Traditionally, The Horned One and the Goddess are often worshipped together to

provide balance between masculine and feminine forces, as in the song "I am Here" (by

Greg Johnson):

3) I am the center, I am the Goddess dancing,
   I am the heart circle, I am the Horned One singing.

Although the idea of worshipping these two deities as a form of gender balance is taken

from Feminist Neopaganism (see Rodgers 1993), the mix of male and female gods

reflects the androgynous gender identity associated with radical faeries. However, The

typical Neopagan understanding of The Horned One is redefined for radical faeries to

remove the stain of hetero-imitative masculinity.

As with the invention of the *queer god*, the reinterpretation of The Horned One as

distinct from other forms of Neopagan practice reinforces the ideology of essential faerie

uniqueness. Because no other religious tradition addresses the unique spiritual needs of

radical faeries, special gods must be invented or pre-existing gods must be radically re-

interpreted. This socio-discursive positioning of faeries as outside of any existing

religious traditions is reproduced in the forms of appropriation found in *Ye Faerie*

Hymnal. The process of combining elements borrowed from a wide range of religious

traditions that are sometimes in direct conflict with one another serves to disconnect

radical faeries from any single religious or cultural tradition.

3.   Chronotopes in *Ye Faerie Hymnal*

3.1   Chronotopes

As noted earlier, chronotopes are the spatial and temporal aspects of the context in

which narratives and other forms of speech occur (Bakhtin 1981), as in *a long time ago in*

a galaxy far far away. In addition to indexing the context in which a narrative occurs,

chronotopes may also index the spatio-temporal context in which the narrative is being

told or how the narrative was originally learned (e.g. *my grandmother used to tell me this story*). Thus, chronotopes operate across different indexical orders (Silverstein 2005). As with other forms of indexicality, chronotopes trigger associations with chronotopes at higher levels (Silverstein 2003, Anderson 2011). The relationships between chronotopes (across orders) serve to link specific places and times with the moment in which the narrative is told. The significance of chronotopes emerges from the dialogical relationships that exist between them (Bakhtin 1981, Silverstein 2005, Anderson 2011).

Linking the present (moment of narration) with a specific place or time may (explicitly or through inference) index specific ideologies or forms of cultural knowledge. Knowledge concerning how, where, or when some past event occurred provides critical information relevant to living in the present (see Basso 1996, Debenport 2009). Thus, the relationships between orders of chronotopes may serve to unify and reinforce broader ideologies or understandings of group identity (Silverstein 2005, Dick 2010, Stasch 2011).

I will discuss three important chronotopes indexed in *Ye Faerie Hymnal*. The chronotope of provenance refers to the document itself, including the places and times associated with the writing and compilation of the songs included and the hymnal's current open-ended temporality and virtual location as the internet text. The chronotope of performance indexes contexts in which the hymnal may actually be used, the moments and times when radical faeries come together and sing or chant, including moments of joyful singing of songs in the celebration of community and the use of ritual chants associated with magic or states of higher consciousness. Finally, the chronotope of cultural property refers to the cultural origins associated with various songs. This

includes the times and places associated with the religious tradition from which a song is appropriated as well as the times and places associated with deities or characters referenced in specific songs. These three chronotopic orders work together to indexically link contemporary faeries with a wide range of historical and cultural contexts in order to construct radical faerie ideologies of gender, sexuality, and individual identity.

3.1 Chronotopes of provenance

Like most hymnals, *Ye Faerie Hymnal* includes a variety of songs from different sources. Given the important role of appropriation within faerie culture, it is not surprising that the musical works in *Ye Faerie Hymnal* are taken from a wide range of sources. However, appropriations that index a chronotope in which some group is positioned in opposition to Judeo-Christian traditions (and Christianity in particular) are the most common. Thus, among the music included in the hymnal, European pagan, Near Eastern, and Native American religious traditions seem to be held in the highest esteem. Appropriation is perhaps the most important trope in radical faerie discourse. Consider the following example, from an article called "What is a radical faerie?" that appeared in RFD magazine:

> When our forefaeries dreamed us up, they imagined we would radically alter the perception of queers in the Muggle world by turning away from assimilation into straight, capitalistic culture and *toward* a proud queerness informed by Native American and other pagan traditions. (deWally 2009:3)

In addition to explicitly recognizing Native American and "other pagan" traditions, this example appropriates from feminism and popular culture. The author's use of *forefaeries* reflects faerie appropriation of wordplay conventions (such as *herstory*) in radical feminist writings. The term "Muggle world" is taken from the Harry Potter novels

(Rowlings 1997 etc.). In both cases, however, the sources of appropriation are indexically positioned in opposition to fundamentalist forms of Christianity. Faeries often use wordplay similar that found in the work of Mary Daly (1978, 1983). Daly's criticism of the androcentricism in Judeo-Christian traditions aligns with Harry Hay's critique concerning homophobia. Similarly, fundamentalist Christians have raised concerns about the centrality of magic and mysticism in the Harry Potter series and some have even tried to ban the books from school libraries. The range of associations evoked in this quote reflects a common pattern in faerie discourse to draw associations with social groups and contexts that have been traditionally positioned in opposition to Christianity.

Ye Faerie Hymnal lists the author/composer of all songs, with "author unknown" included where the information was unavailable. The selections include numerous songs by New Age Feminist singers like Lisa Thiel and Starhawk. There are also songs written by various radical faeries (e.g. one song is listed as "Compliments of Proudpansy"). Although there is a clear effort to attribute songs to the proper sources, the ways in which songs are attributed creates a cultural division. Most contemporary songs of unknown provenance are listed as "Author Unknown" or "Traditional" while songs appropriated from cultures beyond northern Europe are listed as coming from a specific cultural tradition (e.g. Traditional Native Chant, Traditional Russian Folksong). Generally, those songs marked as belonging to some cultural tradition index chronotopes associated with histories of oppression in the name of Christianity. Given that many gay men raised in (particularly fundamentalist) Christian families have extremely negative experiences associated with religious institutions, it is understandable that some gay men have come to equate Christianity with homophobia. For radical faeries, differentiation from Christian

identity is conveyed through the combination of appropriations associated with non-Christian religious traditions described in the previous section.

The most common unifying trait across forms of radical faerie appropriation is opposition to Christianity. However, not every religion that could be positioned in opposition to Christianity is a likely source of appropriation. For example, appropriations from Fundamentalist Islam would potential index a stereotype of opposition to Christianity, but would also index the very sorts of homophobia that serve as the basis for radical faerie anti-Christian stance. *Ye Faerie Hymnal* does include one example from Islam, but the song is from the Sufi Islamia Ruhaniat Society, which shares the radical faerie belief of transforming society through cultivating inner spirituality.

The formation of anti-Christian stance through appropriation can be compared to the construction of anti-Christian identity by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. The Order of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence is a subculture in which gay men dress in "nun drag", wearing habits and wimples combined with gaudy jewelry and outrageous make-up (see Figure 3.5). The dominant trope in SPI culture is mockery of Catholicism. The organization of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence is based on that of religious orders and men must complete a novitiate period in which they demonstrate their dedication by performing charitable acts. The Sisters also name "saints" including gay rights activists, workers for gay charities, and a variety of celebrities (such as comedian Margaret Cho and gay porn actor Michael Brandon). The Mother House in San Francisco celebrates Easter with a "Hunky Jesus Contest" that follows a pub crawl mimicking the Stations of the Cross in which the stations are replaced with gay bars and the offices of LGBT organizations. Unlike radical faerie names which appropriate from other religions,

the names taken by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence often mock Christian (particularly Catholic) traditions (e.g. Mysteria of the Order of the Broken Hymen, Holly Lewya, OyVeyMaria).

Figure 3.5 Sister Innocenta (Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence) (Paris, 2007)

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence position themselves in opposition to the Christian "Other" through overt mocking. In contrast, the radical faeries construct a similar social position by aligning themselves with religious and cultural traditions that are discursively positioned in opposition to Christianity. While the mocking of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence directly indexes (and undermines) Christian social identity, the appropriations of radical faeries index social traits linked through association with specific combinations of signs associated with non-Christian traditions. Although the

mechanisms involved in the formation of anti-Christian stance are quite different, the result carves out a similar social space so that radical faeries and the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence acts as allies, often cooperating in activism and charity work.

As with the appropriation of the language of "white women" by African American drag queens discussed in Chapter One, the appropriations in radical faerie culture do not reflect identification with the outgroup sources of appropriated signs. Rather, these appropriations mark social traits that are only loosely connected to the original outgroup sources. Although indexing social attributes may triggers association with higher order identities (see Silverstein 2003), cases of appropriation may operate in the other direction so that indexing a social category may serve to link an individual with social traits from that category. While the combination of numerous faerie appropriations prevents direct affiliation with any of the original outgroup social categories, it also serves to normativize faerie culture by binding faerie identity to a specific marginalized anti-Christian stance.

There are three songs in *Ye Faerie Hymnal* with clear Judeo-Christian origins. *Lord of the Dance* (by Sidney Carter) is attributed to the Methodist Hymnal, but the lyrics in *Ye Faerie Hymnal* are changed to replace all Christian references with references to nature or paganism (e.g. "I danced on Sabbat when you dance out the spell"). *Tis a Gift to be Simple* is listed as an "Old Shaker Song", erasing any direct religious connection to Christianity. The version included in *Ye Faerie Hymnal* has no references to Christianity, so that its inclusion indexes Shaker spiritual practices (that were condemned by other contemporary Christian groups). Finally, the hymnal includes a version of the 133rd Psalm which is listed as a "Traditional Jewish Song" with a Hebrew title ("Hine Ma

Tov"), obscuring the fact that the song occurs in the Christian Bible. By obscuring any ties to Christianity and making indexical associations with traditions that are stereotypically viewed as oppositional to Christian beliefs, radical faeries are able to construct an anti-Christian stance that eschews direct reference to the Christian beliefs it opposes.

In some cases, the attribution of songs marks moments in radical faerie history, such as important gatherings (e.g. *By Emerald, For The Wings And Waves Gathering, Fall 1990*). The song, "We are the Stonewall Girls" is attributed to *Those At The FAG Event, NYC June 1989.* Although the attribution marks an important faerie event (the Faerie Action Gathering), the song actually originated with the drag queen protesters during the Stonewall riots and is a common index of the riots themselves and the early gay rights movement more generally (see Duberman 1994) . The shift in provenance is probably not intentional, but it symbolizes the tension between radical faerie identity as gay "not-men" and the gay rights movement. Other songs are listed as being written by specific faeries (*By Albert At Okanagen Healing Gathering, Spring 1990*). These may be listed by conventional name, by faerie name, or both (*By Gil Morris (Orion Stormcrow)*). Other songs are attributed to specific faeries circles (*Kawashaway North Woods Faerie Tribe*).

For songs that include copies of sheet music, there are sometimes stories about the origin of the song. For example, the Seven Fabrics Chant is a parody of the Seven Goddess Chant, a common chant used by a variety of New Age and Neopagan groups. The radical faerie parody replaces the goddesses with seven different fabrics. The sheet

music in *Ye Faerie Hymanl* includes a personal reflection on the moment when the Seven Fabrics Chant was first performed:

> This chant is a playful parody of "The Seven Goddess Chant." I was present when this chant was created. It was a beautiful day on the knoll at Short Mountain Sanctuary during a May Day Gathering many years ago. As I chatted with friends I heard some faeries across the way singing an early rough version of this chant and laughing with delight. Over the course of the next few hours, different fabrics and fibers were tried and the chant was refined. The toughest was the last name: nothing sounded right. The chant was sad and incomplete. That is, until someone finally suggested that wondrous lost fabric from the seventies, Qiana. Now the chant was finished, perfect and fabulous. How delightful to sing this that evening while we danced around the bonfire! (*Ye Faerie Hymnal*)

These attributions and origin stories evoke chronotopes of cultural continuity founded in an implicit history of the radical faerie movement. The references to various past events and distant locales in which faeries came together and came up with new songs allows the hymnal to serve as a historical documentation of radical faerie culture. This serves to unify ideologies of group identity by implying that radical faerie cultural practice transcends any specific place or time.

Although it includes religious songs and chants, *Ye Faerie Hymnal* is designed as a general resource for faerie gatherings and includes songs that are not religious in nature. Examples include children's campfire songs like *Make New Friends (But Keep the Old), Teddy Bears' Picnic*, Dr. Seuss' *Waltzing with Bears*, and *I Know a Weenie Man*. The inclusion of such songs indexes a chronotope of summer camp or other forms of outdoor group recreation for children, linking faerie gatherings with similar "campfire" contexts. The songs associated with the campfire setting also link to Hay's original faerie philosophy of reuniting "with the cornered, frightened, rejected little Sissy-kids we all once were" (Hay 1996:255). The campfire context of faerie gatherings

recreates the adolescent experiences in a context that celebrates the "different" boy that embodies the heteronormative gender oppression that Hay associated with Judeo-Christian traditions.

Another feature of songs in *Ye Faerie Hymnal* is the use of camp parody, even in cases where songs may be revered in New Age religious practice. The Seven Fabrics Chant mentioned above is one of several parodies of the Seven Goddess Chant by Deana Metzger ("Isis Astarte Diana Hecate Demeter Kali Inana"). There is a corresponding but less popular Seven God Chant by Charlie Murphy ("Pan Poseidon Dionysus Cernunnos Mithras Loki Apollo"). Although both the Seven Goddess and Seven God Chants are included in *Ye Faerie Hymnal*, there are also parodies, including the Seven Fabrics Chant ("Lycra, Spandex, Dacron, Polyester, Nylon, Orlon, Quiana"), the Food Chant ("Ice cream, a pop tart and a pizza, Pecan pie, Dove bars, banana") and the Starbuck's version of the Food Chant ("Ice Cream, a pop tart, chocolate latte, gelato, pizza, banana"). Clearly, chanting about spandex or Dove bars is not intended as a legitimate road to spiritual enlightenment. Rather, the additional faerie chants are simply parodies of the original New Age chants (notice that the parodies end with rhymes corresponding to Inana in the original Seven Goddess Chant).

Similarly, the song "May the Circle Be Open" (Author Unknown) is listed with a parodic version in which the line "Merrie meet and Merrie part and Merrie meet again" is replaced with "Merry Meet, and Merry Part, and Mary Tyler Moore." It is important to note that these are parodies of traditional Neopagan chants and songs, so that the humor is self-directed (as is common in camp discourse, see Harvey 2002). In addition to the camp element of singing about fabrics, lattes and Mary Tyler Moore, these

parodies index a cavalier and playful attitude towards religious practice in general, while queering New Age religious practice to fit radical faerie language ideologies. The parodies evoke the moment when some group of faeries produced a version of the song that reflected camp sensibility. As with the inclusion of campfire songs, the parodies index past faerie gatherings, legitimizing radical faerie practices as historically transcendent and reinforcing understandings of an imagined faerie community.

The chronotopes of provenance provide resources for the construction of radical faerie identity by linking readers and users of the hymnal with the places and times in which specific songs originated. The attributions in *Ye Faerie Hymnal* link this contemporary cultural artifact with prior historical contexts associated with forms of Christian oppression, faerie history, and faerie language ideologies. The chronotopes of provenance index a form of faerie culture and religious beliefs that transcends any specific moment or place in time.

3.2   Chronotopes of cultural property

Appropriation creates indexical links between a speaker and the group that is the original source of the appropriated forms. Because a complete and consistent use of outgroup language would risk indexing outgroup identity rather than specific personal traits, appropriation is always partial and fragmented. Flaunting forms of appropriation may serve as a resource for the construction of whiteness (see Bucholtz 1999, 2011, Hill 1998, 2008, Barrett 2006). Similar to displaying art or momentos that index middle-class practices of travel and tourism (*we got that in Hawai'i*), appropriations from other cultures may index being cosmopolitan and culturally aware within white discourse (see Hill 1998, 2008).

While appropriation from a wide range of source groups may index broad cultural knowledge, it also makes it clear that a speaker's identity is not equivalent to that associated with any of the original source groups. The combination of appropriations conveys social traits through indexical analogy, so that radical faerie identity emerges from combination of traits that overlap across stereotypes concerning the different source groups. Thus, it is not the case that radical faeries necessarily identify as Native Americans, Celtic pagans, or New Age Feminists. Rather, radical faerie identity consists of those stereotyped traits that may be simultaneously associated with Native Americans, Celtic pagans, New Age Feminists, and so on.

In many cases, the rampant appropriation in radical faerie culture overlaps with other forms of New Age or Neopagan practice. In what is sometimes called "supermarket spirituality" (see Aupers and Houtman 2006), New Age believers borrow freely from disparate cultural and religious traditions. Consider the Seven Goddess Chant (mentioned above): Isis, Astarte, Diana, Hecate, Demeter, Kali, Inana.

Each of these goddesses is associated with a specific time and place when she was worshipped. Isis (from Ancient Egypt) and Astarte (Mesopotamia) are both associated with fertility. Diana Hecate, and Demeter all emerge from Ancient Greek religion, while Kali is Hindu and Inana originated in Ancient Sumeria. Most of these goddesses are associated with fertility, nature and femininity within New Age movements, although some (Kali, Hecate) have quite different associations in their original traditional contexts. It is through this New Age linkage that the seven goddesses come to have a common meaning, so that their co-occurrence governs their individual interpretation.

This type of religious bricolage can also be seen in the song "I'm in You" (author unknown) which includes religious references from a wide range of traditions. The first lines of the song ("You are my father, you are my brother, you are my lover, you are my friend") are drawn from a Hindu sloka (although the line "You are my mother" has been removed). The original sloka is evoked in the first line of the following verse, which lists religious figures:

4) Brother, father, lover, friend;
    Diana, Esmerelda, Isis, friend;
    Buddha, Krishna, Christ, friend;
    Ocean, mountain, sky, friend.

The various divine figures in this verse represent conflicting traditions, so that there is no adherence to any one of the included traditions. Although there is no direct connection between Diana (Greek) and Isis (Egyptian) mythology, the two figures share the trait of being associated with nature. Although "Esmerelda" [sic] is not a traditional religious figure (the name was first used by Victor Hugo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*), the name Esmeralda is sometimes used to represent a (Tinkerbell-type) fairy associated with nature. For example, Fairy Line, a company marketing fairy-themed products (such as costumes and tea party supplies) to young girls, lists Esmeralda as the "Nature Fairy". Thus, the list indexes the common characteristic between the three figures (a spiritual connection linking femininity with nature). Although Diana is the goddess of hunting and chastity, her inclusion with a commercialized commodity 'fairy' and an Egyptian goddess (who are both associated with nature) makes it clear that "chastity" is not the motivation for Diana's interpretation. Of course, the faerie religious context governs interpretation of why these three names occur. Without the guiding faerie New Age contextualization, it could just as easily be assumed that "Diana" refers to Wonder Woman, Esmeralda is the

mother on *Bewitched* and Isis refers to the 1970s cartoon superhero, so that the connection is "1970s female television characters with magical powers".

The next line of "I'm in Bloom" (*Buddha, Krishna, Christ, friend*) includes the only reference to Christ in *Ye Faerie Hymnal*. Equating Christ with Buddha and Krishna makes it clear that the inclusion of Christ is not a proclamation of Christian faith. Rather, the three figures are linked because they are male deities who are not stereotypically masculine (and might even be interpreted as androgynous). The common trait between the three deities indexes radical faerie gender ideologies in which androgynous men have an innate higher spirituality (compared to heterosexual men). Like the collection of 'nature goddesses,' this list indexes faerie gender ideology rather than actually claiming Buddhist, Hindu, or Christian beliefs. The paired sets of female and male deities reflects the faerie ideology of androgyny, linking a femininity with nature and male androgyny with inner spirituality.

A similar pattern is found in the song "I am the God" (by Beverly Cady):

5) I am strong in the name of Wodin,
   Pan is the name that sets me free,
   I am wise in the name of Osiris,
   I am the God and the God is me.

Here the combination of gods include Pan (from Greek mythology), Odin (Norse) and Osiris (Egyptian). The connection between the three seems primarily related to their status as male gods, although all are also associated with blurring the human/animal distinction. Odin is able to transform into animals, Pan is half-goat and has horns, and Osiris is often depicted as "the ram god". The mix of animal and human characteristics evokes the figure of The Horned One discussed above. It also evokes the animal spirit companion (nawal) tradition appropriation from Native American cultures. Other songs

in *Ye Faerie Hymnal* refer to Native American animal spirit companions, particularly "Animal Spirit" (author unknown):

6) Animal spirits, I am calling to you,
   Vanishing spirits, come to me now,
   I need your strength to fight against a common enemy,
   Animal spirits, live in me.

As in the cases above, appropriation is intended not to directly link to a religious tradition, but rather serves as a means for evoking the social traits that are most valued in radical faerie ideologies of language and gender.

The pattern of mixing appropriations from different sources extends to linguistic borrowing in "Hiahno! Hiahno! Hiahno!", the only song in *Ye Faerie Hymnal* that is not primarily in English. The song is listed as a "traditional native chant" with English translations provided for the native words:

7) Manitae (Spirit)
   Lehna lehna (Living in our hearts)
   Coyote (Through our unit)
   Hiahno! Hiahno! Hiahno! (Forever and ever and ever)

The "native" words do not seem to be from the same language. *Manitae* [sic] is clearly meant to be a form of proto-Algonkian **maneto:wa* meaning snake or spirit. In traditional Algonkian religions, *manitou* may refer to a spirit or a human with spiritual powers (including the ability to transform into an animal). However, none of the other lines in the song contain words from any Algonkian language (Lucy Thomason, personal communication). *Coyote* would seem to be the English word (borrowed from Nahuatl through Spanish), although the translation of *coyote* as "through our unit" suggests otherwise. The final line (and title) of the song are taken from a popular New Age chant that is widely purported to be Native American in origin. The chant, "Let Us Be One

With the Infinite Sun", is sometimes performed with "native" words including the line "Hiahno! Hiahno! Hiahno!" (which is translated as "forever and ever and ever"). Although the "infinite sun" chant is sometimes said to be in "Sioux", none of the words (including *hiahno*) is readily recognizable as belonging to any Siouan language (Sara Trechter, personal communication). This "infinite sun" chant is also included in *Ye Faerie Hymnal*, although under another name and without the "native" words. The *hiahno* chant, then, contains a mix of supposedly 'native' words drawn from different sources (and different purported languages).

The mix of 'native' elements in the *hiahno* chant is similar to that found in other forms of white appropriations from Native American cultures. The chant could be seen as a linguistic equivalent to costumes for Native American mascots that include elements drawn from radically different traditions with no regard for the sociocultural, political, and religious contexts associated with any of the individual articles of clothing. Similar to the mix of religious sources in the previous examples, the combination of (largely pretend) 'native' elements indexes a generic stereotype of Native American spirituality rather than referencing any specific Native American cultural or religious traditions. They thus become emblematic of an imagined monolithic Native American identity that is associated with white chronotopes of primitive peoples (see Stasch 2011). Such forms of appropriation frequently provoke angry responses from members of the group from which a sign is taken because the mix of elements involves the erasure of distinctions between cultures and produced a monolithic stereotyped representation. This is true of radical faerie appropriations of Native American traditions which have been denounced as a form of cultural theft (see Povinelli 2006).

The chronotopes of cultural origin produce indexical associations between contemporary faerie culture and a wide range of historical and cultural contexts. The cultural significance of indexing chronotopes associated with an imagined Ancient Egypt (or pre-Christian Europe, or Native America) is not necessarily found in similarities between faeries and Ancient Egyptians (or pre-Christian Europeans or Native Americans). The importance of Ancient Egypt cannot be divorced from the other chronotopes involved in faerie appropriation, for the meaning of each is dependent on its relation with the others. Although each of the appropriations has a wide range of potential indexical association, their co-occurrence in relation to chronotopes of contemporary faerie culture allows for the appropriations to be linked through indexical analogy. The traits that co-occur across different chronotopes are those that are most revered in radical faerie ideologies of gender. Indexical analogies across sets of different chronotopes or different historical-religious figures thus come to mark the construction of faerie identity.

3.3   Chronotopes of performance

In addition to indexing chronotopes associated with the songs and their origins, the songs in *Ye Faerie Hymnal* index the chronotope of the place and time when the songs are actually sung. The chronotope of performance is indexed through references to place (*here*) and aspects of performance (such as the arrangement of singers into a circle). The performance chronotope links the moment of singing with the transcendent faerie culture associated with the chronotope of provenance and the ideologies of gender and spirituality associated with chronotopes of cultural property.

Some of the songs in *Ye Faerie Hymnal* make direct reference to how the song should be performed. For example, the Seven Goddess Chant comes with special hand

motions that can be performed as the chant is sung. Although the chant is a common one among New Age groups, the hand motions are unique to radical faeries:

8) The Seven Goddess Chant - Hand motions:
   Isis (fingers make HORNS)
   Astarte (point at the STARS)
   Diana (draw back a BOW)
   Hecate (walk with a CANE)
   Demeter (hands grow up like PLANTS)
   Kali (swing ARMS)
   Inana (rub WOMB)

The hand motions relate to the goddesses involved, so that the singer makes a bow for the hunter Diana and waves his arms in the air for the multi-armed Kali. Although the hand motions are unique to faeries, they include rubbing one's womb, indexing faerie ideologies of fluid gender identity. The singer positions his body to mark indexical alignment with goddesses associated with distant places and times, creating a link between the performance chronotope and the chronotope of cultural property.

Several songs in *Ye Faerie Hymnal* make references to being in a circle, or forming a circle. These include circle casting songs that overlap with other Neopagan or Wiccan groups and songs specific to radical faeries. An example of the latter is *Circling Song* (Author Unknown):

9) We are men of the loving circle,
   We are lovemen who circle the world.

   Shoulder to shoulder standing for hope.
   Hand into hand reaching for love.
   Arm into arm gathering joy,
   Heart into heart cherishing truth.
   Body to body raising our cocks.
   We praise the beauty of brotherhood.

The circle indexes the unity of "brotherhood," or the imagined community of radical faeries. As with the *heart circle,* the circles formed at faerie gathering

create "safe" spaces where faeries are encouraged to be free to express personal thoughts or perform whimsical acts reflecting individual creativity. Although the formation of a circle is related to Neopagan uses of circles more generally, it also indexes the chronotopes of provenance associated with the history of radical faerie gatherings. A circle of people singing around a campfire also indexes the "summer camp" chronotope associated with the inclusion of songs like *I Know a Weenie Man*.

The songs in *Ye Faerie Hymnal* also use *here* to refer to the spatial domain in which the songs are performed (across different locations and times). The *here* in these songs marks the faerie circle (stereotypically around a campfire at a gathering). The circle is the center of spiritual and magical power and supernatural or divine forces are urged to *come* into the circle.

Evocations draw a variety of forces and beings into the circle. "Elements" (by Co'Lo'Neh) calls on the classical elements to *come* and *join our circle here and now*:

10) Air, fire, water, earth,
    Elements of our earthly birth:
    Join our circle here and now,
    Come to us, come to us!

Similarly, "Brothers Remembered" (by Emerald) indexes chronotopes of provenance by calling on deceased radical faeries to *come* and *join* the circle, as in "Brothers :

11) Brothers remembered, brothers very dear,
    Come to join this circle, let us feel you drawing near.
    Brothers on your journey, brothers lovely, queer,
    Come, now, to the circle, let us feel your presence here.

    Gone but not forgotten,
    Dwelling now in other worlds,

We cling to loving memories,
Hold them dear like strings of pearls.

Both of these examples make explicit references to the *here* and *now* of the song performances. In addition to calling forces, deities, or spirits into the circle, songs may celebrate the arrival or presence of deities, as in "The Faggot God is Here" (by the Kawashaway North Woods Faerie Tribe):

12) The Faggot God is here,
    He gives us courage.
    The Faggot God is here,
    He gives us life.
    And we will not be afraid,
    No, we will not be afraid.

The circle is the central site for intersection between the various chronotopes associated with radical faerie culture. The flow of energy and magic within the circle links the singer with his "forefaeries" and with deities from a variety of religious traditions. This is ritually enacted through the linkage between chronotopes that intersect within the circle. In the song "Many Ways, Many Names" (Author Unknown), directs performers to *look within* and *feel to oneness of the flow*:

13) One God, many ways,
    One Goddess, many names.
    From the center all has come,
    To the center all will go.
    One love, many ways,
    One source, many names.
    Look within you for the center,
    Feel the oneness of the flow.

This song symbolically unifies the various appropriation traditions within faerie culture (*One God, many ways. One Goddess, many names*). The various forces have come *from the center* and go *to the center*, so that the center of the circle is both the origin and the destination of the forces and energy created by the circle itself. The religious power of the

circle emerges from the relationships between chronotopes that intersect at the moment of performance.

4.0 Conclusion chronotopic analogy and radical faerie identity

The convergence of indexical elements associated with distinct chronotopes is central to the spiritual experiences in ritual circles, but it also serves to reinforce a sense of community and place in which the present is linked to a distinct cultural history grounded in the sacred site of the sanctuary (see Morgensen 2008). Although New Age movements are often regarded as "cafeteria" or "supermarket" models of individualistic spirituality, radical faerie appropriations are not entirely unregulated. The appropriations are restricted in that they must connect to the broader ideologies of language and gender at play in faerie culture. Specific religious tropes are adopted not simply because of their original religious and cultural significance, but because they display some (often gendered) attribute that can be linked to radical faerie ideologies of androgynous (though still highly androcentric) gender identity. Thus, goddesses that reflect a "feminine" connection with the serenity of nature may be combined with gods that index a "masculine" animal sexuality to construct an androgynous gender identity involving both natural serenity and animal sexuality.

The chronotopes associated with ancient times and distant places come to be important only through their relationships with one another and with the present. Rather, the significance of these chronotopes emerges from their indexical intersection at which analogous tropes are selectively evaluated and aligned with current radical faerie ideologies. These tropes resonate throughout faerie culture. They may index the traits (such as unrestrained sexuality indexed by The Horned One) and stances towards

ideologies (e.g. anti-Christian stance) that serve in the construction of radical faerie identity.

The social position of radical faeries may be read as the result of forms of social marginalization through abjection (Eribon 2004), shame (Halperin 2007, Halperin and Traub 2010), or exclusion from normative forces of kinship or nationhood (Povinelli 2006). As Morgensen (2008) notes, the emergence of radical faeries must be understood in the context of the post-colonial context in it occurred. The construction of this marginalized identity through appropriation from other cultures clearly marks a position of white male privilege. Although white heterosexual New Age believers are largely unaffected by the discursive forces that push radical faeries to the margins of society, they adopt many of the same tactics found in radical faerie culture. In the case of radical faeries, the ability to construct a space outside of heteronormative discourse through appropriation is largely dependent upon white privilege.

While the appropriation of white women's speech by African American drag queens (Chapter One) might be viewed as "stealing from the rich" (literally borrowing from the culture of those with higher social status), the appropriations in radical faerie culture are clearly "stealing from the poor". Although it is possible to view radical faerie culture as a creative attempt to construct a uniquely "queer" social space that celebrates alternative gender expression, it is important to bear in mind that radical faerie appropriation typically borrows in ways that white culture has traditionally borrowed, appropriating from dominated cultures as a means of asserting control.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Class Menagerie: Working-class Appropriations and Bear Identity

1.0   Happy to be fat, glad to be hairy

Bear identity is primarily distinguished from other gay male identities by the physical attributes of being heavyset and hairy. As the slogan of Orsi Italiani (the primary bear organization in Italy) proclaims, "Happy to be fat, glad to be hairy, and proud to be gay"[1] The earliest known references to *bear* as an emergent identity category among gay men come from the newsletter of the Satyrs motorcycle club in Los Angeles in 1966, which mentions the formation of a bear club (Wright 1997: 21), although the actual nature of the club is unknown. In the early 1980s, some gay men (reportedly) began wearing small teddy bears in their back pockets as a way of rebelling against the normativity of the hanky code (Wright 1997a: 21, Hennen 2008: 97). As noted in chapter one, the clone hanky code involved different colored bandanas worn in one's back pocket to index a desire to participate in specific types of sexual interaction. The use of the teddy bear instead of bandanas was meant to rebel against the lack of intimacy within the code and within clone culture more generally, marking an individual's desire for kissing and cuddling rather than the impersonal and emotionally-detached sexual interactions typically associated with cruising for "tricks." However, it is not known if this early use of these teddy bears actually involved either hairiness or weight as elements of bear identity. The solidification and dissemination of *bear* as an identity category occurred in the late 1980s.

Between 1987 and 1989, a number of different events lead to the emergence of shared bear identity in San Francisco and its spread to other parts of the United States. In 1987, a group of gay men in Berkeley and San Francisco began holding "play parties" (i.e. parties involving group sex) for men who were marginalized by other gay men because of their weight or age (Wright 1997a: 29-30). Also in 1987, *BEAR* magazine debuted in San Francisco (Wright 1997a: 31-2). A pornographic magazine that aimed to show men who were hairier, larger, and older than the men in "mainstream" gay pornography, *BEAR* emphasized working-class masculinity, with men typically appearing in clothing associated with "blue-collar" workers (such as truckers, mechanics or lumberjacks). The following year (1988), the Bears Mailing List (BML) was established as an internet mailing list specifically for bears. The BML quickly gained widespread popularity and played an important role in spreading bear identity beyond Northern California. Although the BML still exists, a plethora of bear websites now provide the sort of information and social networking opportunities that made the BML so popular in the early 1990s. In 1989, the Lone Star Saloon opened in San Francisco as the first bar marketed specifically to bears. Twenty years later, the Lone Star Saloon is still central to bear culture and many bears make "pilgrimages" to San Francisco specifically to visit the first true "bear bar."

The emergence of bear identity is also tied to the historical context of the AIDS epidemic (see Wright 1997: 14-16). While the idealized clone in the 1970s typically displayed chest hair, the practice of shaving body hair became prevalent in the early 1980s (particularly in gay pornography). During the early years of the AIDS epidemic, body hair could potentially cover lesions caused by Kaposi syndrome, so that the display

of body hair might hide the physical signs of illness. Because of the physical wasting associated with those suffering from AIDS, being heavyset suggested that a man was perhaps less likely to be infected. The linking of body hair with being heavyset allowed early bears to draw upon the masculine associations with body hair privileged in clone culture without the suggestion that one might be using hair to cover Kaposi lesions.

In the years since *bear* first emerged as an identity category, bear subculture has spread both within the United States and internationally. The website *The Ultimate Bear Resource* (http://ultimatebearlinks.pbworks.com) lists bear clubs in forty-five of the fifty states, along with national organizations for Latino Bears, HIV-positive Bears, Deaf Bears, and Pagan Bears (some of whom may identify as radical faeries). There are also bear clubs throughout both Western and Eastern Europe and Latin America, as well as clubs in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Japan. There are now numerous bear bars around the world, including bars in Paris, Beirut, Seoul and Buenos Aires.

Bears are almost universally portrayed as attempting to assert hegemonic heteronormative masculinity, although critics disagree on whether or not bear masculinity subverts or reinforces heterosexual norms. The signs bears used to index masculinity are clearly grounded in ideologies of the relationship between gender, social class, and regional identity, as bear style consists of signs that are typically associated with rural (particularly Southern) working-class heterosexual men. However, in both socio-political ideologies and social practice, bears draw heavily on (second-wave) lesbian feminism. Bear discussions of the body and nature involve numerous appropriations from the work of prominent lesbian feminists like Andrea Dworkin and Mary Daly. Although bears typically participate in activities associated with working-class masculinity, such as

watching sports or camping, they are just as likely to participate in activities that are stereotypically associated with rural working-class femininity like sharing recipes at pot-luck dinners or demonstrating their crochet skills at bear craft fairs. Thus, bear identity involves the performative assertion of class and regional identities as much as it involves gendered identities.

This chapter examines the role of language in the emergence and solidification of bear subculture by analyzing discourse from the early years of the Bears Mailing List, the central site for the discursive construction of bear identity. The first part of the chapter examines the development of the 'bear codes,' a classification of physical and personality traits that served both to define bear identity in general and to allow individuals to position themselves in terms of their relationship to the emergent identity category. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the discourse of gender and class on BML, focusing on the appropriation and eroticization of class and regional identities. One specific genre of postings on BML, the *bear sighting*, served to normativize bear ideologies of desire around class stereotypes. As stereotypes of Southern working-class men became central to bear identity, contributors to BML began using nonstandard orthography typically associated with stereotyped representations of Southerners as hillbillies and rednecks. Although it is generally assumed that gay male identity is conveyed through non-normative indexical markers of gender, the use of Mock Hillbilly among bears demonstrates that the performative construction of sexual identity need not rely solely on gender, but may also involve markers of social class. Similarly, the importance of working-class signs in the construction of bear identity challenges dominant ideologies in which gay men are assumed to orient towards middle class identity.

2.0   Aspects of bear identity

2.1   The BML and the birth of beardom

When Steve Dyer and Brian Gollum established the BML in 1988, forms of computer-mediated communication were not particularly widespread. Because the number of individuals with access to e-mail was fairly limited at the time, early participants on BML were primarily men who work in the computer industry, government, academia and libraries. The number of librarians on the BML was particularly high and postings specific to librarians (such as discussions of the meetings of the American Library Association) were quite common. The subset of bears who were librarians even adopted the term *libearian* to refer to themselves as a distinct constituent within bear subculture. Because bear identity first emerged among middle-class men in northern California, a number of early bears worked in Silicon Valley and were familiar with new technologies. When the BML was founded, bear identity was still largely confined to the Bay Area and the BML played a central role in spreading the concept of bears as an identity category to other parts of the United States and, ultimately, the world.

The language analyzed in this chapter comes from the first eight years of the BML (1988-1996). It was during this period that the BML had its greatest influence, as the spread of the internet in the late 1990s lead to additional websites that eclipsed the BML as central social spaces for bear interactions. Data are presented in their original form, including spelling and typing errors. All data are from the electronic archive of the BML contain in the *Les Wright Papers and Bear History Project* files in the manuscript collection of the Cornell University Library.

In the first few years after its inception, the BML grew rapidly and bear clubs began to emerge throughout the United States. The editors of *A Bear's Life*, a bear lifestyle magazine, estimate that there were 1.4 million self-identified bears in the United States in 2008 (Hunt 2008). Organized gatherings for bears, known as *bear runs* began in 1995 with two primary events, Lazy Bear Weekend in Guerneville, California and the International Bear Rendezvous (IBR) in San Francisco. At present, there are bear runs in the United States almost every weekend of the year, as well as regular bear runs in Europe, Canada, Australia and Mexico. Although some bear runs last an entire week (like Bear Week in Provincetown, Massachusetts), bear runs usually last three or four days over a long weekend. There are both outdoor runs, typically held at campgrounds, and indoor runs held at hotels. Much like circuit parties (discussed in Chapter Five), bear runs are intended as ways of raising money for health and civil rights charities. The IBR (perhaps the most important bear run) hosts the annual International Bear competition in which bears compete for various titles including International Daddy Bear (for older bears), International Bear Cub (for younger bears), International Grizzly Bear (for larger bears) and the general title of International Mr. Bear. The main focus of bear runs is bear parties and other social events, particularly bear pool parties (or *bear soup* in bear slang). They may also include vendors selling products marketed to bears, video game competitions, shows involving comedians or musicians, sports competitions, outdoor activities (like mountain biking or rafting), art exhibits, Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, craft displays, and Christian religious services.

Bears are particularly self-conscious about their identity as bears and there are numerous forms of cultural production that revolve around bear identity. A wide range of

artistic, literary, and musical works have been produced from the bear perspective, emphasizing the cultural distinctiveness of bears. The website Bear Café (http://www.bearcafe.org/beararts.html) list over sixty self-identified "bear artists" who produce works that portray the bear ideal of physical attractiveness or celebrate working-class men. The first bear novel, *Bear Like Me* by Jonathan Cohen was published in 2003 and the first bear film, *Cachorro* (*Bear Cub* in English) was released in 2004 by Spanish director Miguel Albaladejo. In keeping with the working-class and rural orientations of bear subculture, bear music is typically country, bluegrass or folk music. *Bearapalooza*, a large concert of bear musicians travels around the United States on tour every summer.

There are also numerous symbolic markers of bear identity that are marketed specifically to bear customers. The bear paw is the most common bear symbol and many bears wear tattoos of a bear paw to indicate their pride in being a bear. The bear flag (formally known as the International Bear Brotherhood Flag) was introduced in 1995 by Maryland designer Craig Byrnes. The flag has seven horizontal stripes in different colors intended to reflect the diversity in human hair and skin tones.[2] The flag has a large black bear paw in the upper left-hand corner.

Figure 4.1: International Bear Brotherhood Flag

The bear flag and the paw symbol are incorporated into a wide range of commercial products marketed as indicators of "bear pride." In addition to the expected coffee cubs,

t-shirts, baseball caps, bumper stickers, and refrigerator magnets, the products marketed to bear aprons, bear shirts for dogs, license plate covers, beard shampoos, wallets, watches, underwear and Christmas ornaments. Bear home décor is also quite common, including toilet paper holders, shower curtains, welcome mats, sheets and comforters, picture frames, throw rugs, lamps, dinnerware and table linens. Most of these products involve the colors from the bear flag, bear paws or bear slogans (e.g. "Not all bears like fish!"), but items that contain images of actual bears are also fairly common. These various cultural artifacts and products reinforce bear identity by allowing bears to surround themselves with symbolic markers of identity.

In addition to producing and consuming bear-oriented products, art, and music, bears are highly involved in documenting and theorizing their own culture. Historian Les Wright has been particularly active in the documentation of bear culture, founding the Bear History Project, archiving materials related to bear culture, and editing two volumes of bear history (Wright 1997, 2001). Ron Suresha has also written widely about bear culture and has edited a book of interviews with prominent bears (Suresh 2002a) and two collections of bear erotica (Suresha 2002b, 2004). Bear self-theorizing does not simply promote bear identity, but is quite reflexive in discussion a wide range of issues, including bear understandings of masculinity, the marginalized position of bears within gay communities, perceptions of bear bodies and self-image, and the appropriation of working-class signs within bear culture. There is also tongue-in-cheek "Bear Handbook" (Kampf 2000) that outlines stereotypes of bear identity while also providing information on bear clubs, bear runs, and bear bars. Like much bear writing, *The Bear Handbook* takes a humorous approach to imagining an essentialized bear identity, proposing a long-

standing historical bear tradition that includes attributes bear identity to historical figures (such as Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, and Pyotr Tchaikovsky) and mythological characters (such as Hercules, Paul Bunyan, and Santa Claus).

2.1   The bear codes and bear slang

As discussed in chapter one, the meaning of social identity categories is founded upon a set of attributes and interactional stances that members of a category are assumed to possess or display. Although any given individual may not display all of the attributes associated with the category, the degree to which an individual is seen as a prototypical member of an identity category depends on the degree to which the attributes apply to an individual. In the emergence of bear identity, the original triad of attributes (hairy, large and gay) eventually developed into a wide range of characteristics beyond physical appearance and sexual preference, including norms for social interaction, preferred forms of entertainment and leisure activities, and types of personal relationships. One early and important factor in the elaboration and normativization of bear identity was the emergence of the "bear codes" on the BML. Although originally intended as a humorous way of self-identification, the bear codes came to play a central role on the BML and eventually became a standard by which individuals were judged (see Wright 1991).

The bear codes were first introduced in 1989 by two astronomers who were members of the BML (Donahue and Stoner 1989, 1997). In keeping with the working-class associations in bear culture, legend has it that the decision to develop the code occurred at a Wendy's hamburger restaurant where Donahue and Stoner were discussing the need for some way of categorizing individual bears. The code is based upon the classification system used by astronomers to categorize stars. Because technology at the

time was not capable of easily transmitting photographs electronically, the bear codes

became a way for individuals to present a succinct self-description so that other bears

might know not only what they looked like, but also their mannerisms and sexual

behaviors. Although the "Natural Bears Classification System" was designed by Donahue

and Stoner, it was intended to be adjusted and revised through discussions by members of

the BML. Although the title of the code includes the word "natural," the original code

was introduced as "Version 1.0" similar to forms of computer software that are updated

and changed on a regular basis. Based on suggestions from members of the BML, revised

versions were sporadically introduced. After the bear code was introduced, many

members of the BML used it in their e-mail signatures (often both on and off the list) to

both convey the coded information to other bears and to index their identity as members

of the bear community.

The first and most basic element of the bear codes describes the type of beard

worn by the bear in question, indicated with a capital B, followed by a number between

zero and nine indicating different beard types:

1) B0 – Little or no beard
   B1 – Very slight beard
   B2 – Slight beard
   B3 – Thin beard
   B4 – Mostly full beard
   B5 – Full beard
   B6 – Very full beard
   B7 – Longish, bushy beards
   B8 – Very long beards
   B9 – Belt-buckle grazing long beards
        "The prototype is ZZ Top. Need we say more?"
   (Donahue and Stoner 1997)

The majority of other elements in the bear code are marked with a series of lower-case

letters followed by a scale from "- -" to "+ +" to indicate range below or above the degree

to which the "prototypical bear" would possess the trait in question. If a bear matches the

prototype for a given trait, it is unmarked. As Donohue and Stoner explain:

> It is not necessary to have a "grade" for each of these traits! For each there is a "neutral" value, which basically describes someone who is "average" or "unknown" within that trait. These "neutral" values are given below, but would not be reported --- treat them as either "default" or "assumed". (Donohue and Stoner 1996)

The way in which the range of values operates can be seen in the following example,

which describes the range for "fur" (or hairiness):

2) **f - "The FUR factor".** Some bears are particularly hairy about the rest of their bodies, others INCREDIBLY furry, yet others though rightfully bears, have little or no fur on their chests, arms, legs, back, butt, etc. So, one of the following may be added to better describe a bear's fur:

   f++ WAY above average fur
   f+ above average fur
   f furry in a bearish sense
   (none) "neutral"
         (avg. fur from a sample population of both bears and non-bears)
   f- below average fur
   f-- WAY below average fur--"Nair-smooth to the max!"
   (Donahue and Stoner 1997: 151)

This same basic pattern is repeated for a series of traits as follows:

3) f = FUR
    t = TALLNESS
    w = WEIGHT
    c = CUB
    d = DADDY
    g = GROPE (likes to be "pawed")
    k = KINKY
    s = SEX/SLUT
    m = MUSCLE
    e = ENDOWMENT
    h = "behr" factor (mustache, no beard)
    r = RUGGED/OUTDOOR
    p = PECULIAR
    q = "the Q factor" (Donahue and Stoner 1997: 151-5)

In addition to physical characteristics, the code includes sexual behavior (e.g. how kinky or "slutty" a given bear might be or how much they are willing to be groped by other bears). Some elements of the code are not supposed to ever be given negative values, such as muscles and endowment (penis size), so that there may be e++, but one shouldn't use e--. The final three elements (r, p, and q) refer to mannerisms or preferred pastimes. The "r" value refers to how much a bear enjoys outdoor activities like hiking or camping, while "p" reflects the view that bears are, in general, peculiar compared to non-bears. The "Q factor" refers to "queen" and indicates how effeminate a bear is. Although "r" is defined as "rugged," it is not meant to be in opposition to "q," as a bear may enjoy outdoor activities and still be "queeny."

Although the *cub* and *daddy* elements of the code are generally associated with age, they actually refer to a set of characteristics that may be independent of the actual age of the bear in question. In addition to potentially being relatively young among bears, one might identify as a cub because they are new to the bear scene, because they are searching for a nurturing partner, or even because they are a bottom (the receptive partner in anal intercourse). Similarly, a daddy may simply be nurturing, a long-time bear, or a top (the insertive partner in anal intercourse) so that identifying as a daddy does not mean that one is necessarily older than those who identify as cubs. Thus, it is possible for there to be a daddy/cub couple in which the cub is actually older than the daddy. Because of these various meanings of *cub* and *daddy*, it is possible for a bear to identify as both a *daddy* and a *cub* and as the bear codes evolved, hybrid *cub/daddy* identities were included:

4) Note there are now also HYBRID classes "cd" and "dc":
   cd A cub with "daddy tendencies"... Sort of like a "grown up cub".
   dc A daddy with cub-like tendencies/features.
   dc- More daddy than cub
   d+c REAL daddyish and also VERY cubbish
   (Donahue and Stoner 1997: 152-3)

Finally, these basic letters with +/- modifications may also be marked with additional information or punctuation as below:

5) v = variable, not rigid for individual behavior
   ! = prototypical degree of attribute (f++!)
   () = dependent on situational context
   ? = unknown, unobserved, or unrevealed
   : = evidentiary support, but unknown
   (Donahue and Stoner 1997: 155-6)

In presenting the bear codes, Donahue and Stoner offered their own codes as an example of what a complete bear code would look like:

6) Bob Donahue   B5 c+ f w s-: t- r k?
   Jeff Stoner   B6 f+ w sv r+ k(+?)
   (Donahue and Stoner 1997: 156)

The bear codes became a very important marker of bear identity and although their use has declined with the rise of internet dating sites (and the ability to post photographs), they are recognized as an important part of bear history. There are t-shirts marketed to bears with elements of the code that refer to sexual practices and social identities (e.g. c++, d++, k++, or s++).

The authors of the bear codes emphasize that there are no negative traits in the code. This is the reason that the codes for traits like muscles and endowment do not have negative values. Although bears are often assumed to be obsessed with masculinity, the code authors note that being "queeny" is also a positive trait:

7) …Yes, Virginia, "q" is a GOOD thing just like "t-- and t++ are GOOD things", "w-- and w++ are GOOD things"; nothing negative should be

associated with the *labels* pertaining to classification (Donahue and Stoner 1997:155).

The bear codes suggest an attempt to define bear identity in an egalitarian manner that avoids references to social categories that are typically associated with forms of prejudice in the gay community (or society in general). There are no codes to indicate race, ethnicity, social class, profession, religion, or age (although *cub/daddy* may have meanings unassociated with age). However, as bear slang developed, terms referring to ethnicity and age entered into the bear lexicon. Like much bear slang, these terms build upon the bear metaphor, such as *black bear* to refer to African American bears, *brown bears* to refer to Middle Eastern and South Asian bears, *pandas* to refer to Asian bears, and *osos* (Spanish for "bears") to refer to Latino bears. Similarly, older bears (with white hair) are referred to as *polar bears.*

Other bear slang terms either use puns involving "bear" or extensions of the bear metaphor. Examples of bear slang puns include the following:

> hus*bear* – partner or husband
> neigh*bear* – neighbor
> cy*bear*/cy*bear*space – cyber/cyberspace
> li*bear*ian – librarian
> *bear*-b-que – bar-b-que
> *bear*-a-oke - karaoke
> *fur*gasm – orgasm

Terms that build on the bear metaphor include:

> trapper – bear chaser
> den – bedroom, home
> ursine – has bear characteristics
> Goldilocks – woman with bear friends (a bear 'fag hag')
> bruin – a bear athlete (based on the UCLA mascot)
> maul – the vendor market at a bear run (a pun on *mall*)

The other primary subset of bear slang involves terms referring to other animals (or specific subspecies of bears):

> otter – a bear that is skinnier than average
> grizzly – a bear that is exceptionally large
> wolf – a bear that is muscular and/or a sexually-aggressive top
> badger – a sexually-aggressive bottom

The only bear slang term that doesn't fit into these categories is *woof*, which is a greeting that indicates that the speaker finds the addressee sexually attractive. The term *woof* may be used as a verb (as in "that guy was *woofing* me") or an adjective *woofy* (meaning someone attractive enough to merit being *woofed*) but is most typically used as a greeting. Like the bear codes, the term *woof* is a very prevalent marker of bear identity and t-shirts, baseball caps and belt buckles that say "woof" are common bear accessories.

The bear metaphor is sometimes evoked through including actual animal noises in one's speech. Occasionally, contributors to the BML would use orthography to represent growling, as in the following post from 1991 encouraging readers to attend the Bear Expo in Toronto:

8) GGGGRRRRReetings, yer BeaRRRRishnesses EveRRRRywheRRRRe!!
   <later in the same posting>
   What about the idea that the BML should keep a list of those attending.
   Then, an updated list of names could be included in each mailing. C'mon
   beaRRRRS! Let's get everybody we can out to this thing! Won't it be a
   great day when the whole "bear movement" is as wide-spread as, say, the
   leather stuff, or anything like that? Cuz it's events like this that are gonna
   help it grow, so we need all the bears we can get. (I know I can never get
   enough! GGRR!!). See y'all in SF!!

   WWWaRRRm and WWWWoofie BeaRRRR-Hugs!

Contrary to the representation of bears in John Waters' *A Dirty Shame* (2004), bears do not generally growl in everyday speech. However, growling noises may be used to

indicate sexual attraction or as a form of vocalization during sexual interactions, particularly in bear pornography.

The various extensions of the bear metaphor contribute to the construction of an essentialist view of bear identity by linking bear masculinity with bears in nature. The possibility of metaphorically invoking both actual bears in nature and popular images of bears such as teddy bears or Care Bears allow for the metaphor to index seemingly competing understandings of masculinity. Bears may be rugged, independent outdoorsmen (like actual bears) while also being soft, cuddly, and non-threatening (like teddy bears). Although bears are stereotyped as appropriating heteronormative markers of masculinity without questioning or challenging hegemonic norms, bear masculinity is actually highly contested and regularly debated both on the BML and in self-theorizing by bear academics.

2.3 Bear gender ideology

Because bears draw heavily on working-class masculinity, particularly in terms of style (such as dress), the idea that bear culture is "about" masculinity often goes unquestioned (e.g. Hennen 2008, Sullivan 2008, Harris 1997). Bear masculinity is often viewed as natural and unassuming in ways that could be seen as non-performative, particularly in writing by those outside of (or on the periphery of) bear culture. In an article about Bear Week in Provincetown, Massachusetts, for example, Andrew Sullivan portrays bears as a positive shift from the "caricature" of masculinity found in leathermen and circuit boys:

> But their masculinity is of a casual, unstrained type. One of the least reported but significant cultural shifts among gay men in recent years has been a greater ease with the notion of being men and a refusal to acquiesce in the notion that gayness is somehow in conflict with masculinity. In the

> past, gay manifestations of masculinity have taken a somewhat extreme or
> caricatured form -- from the leathermen to the huge bodybuilders. Bears,
> to my mind, represent a welcome calming down of this trend. They are
> unabashedly masculine but undemonstrative about it. (Sullivan 2008)

Sullivan sees bear masculinity as "undemonstrative" and "casual," suggesting that bear masculinity contrasts sharply with the more self-conscious construction of masculinity in other subcultures like leathermen or circuit boys. The rejection of self-conscious gender display and the view that bear masculinity is 'natural' and unaffected are basic elements of bear gender ideology. Les Wright, for example, discusses the emphasis of 'naturalness' in bear culture:

> The 'naturalness' of bears expresses a position in a complex web: bears
> are 'naturally' men (and not women or queens), bears are 'natural' (as
> opposed to the ritual and artifices of leathersex or gym-buffed 'twinks').
> Bears are engaged in staking their claim in the social hierarchy of the gay
> community-at-large. (Wright 1997b:11)

For Wright, bears are not essentially natural, but rather performatively assert 'naturalness' as a crucial component of masculinity as a way of positioning themselves within the gay community. Viewing themselves as 'natural' compared to other forms of gay male masculinity, allows bears to present an alternative to forms of gay masculinity that typically marginalize men who are heavyset or hairy. Critics of bear culture have argued that this socially-constructed 'naturalness' is just as much a form of 'drag' as the types of masculinity found in other gay male subcultures:

> If the bear movement is inspired by perfectly reasonable frustrations over
> the prevalence in the gay community of a single prescriptive body type, its
> hirsute ideal of rugged masculinity is ultimately as contrived as the
> aesthetic of the designer queen. While bears pretend to oppose the
> 'unnatural' look of urban gay men, nothing could be more unnatural,
> urban, and middle class than the pastoral fantasy of the smelly
> mountaineer in long johns, a costume drama that many homosexuals are
> now acting out as self-consciously as Marie Antionette and her entourage
> dressed up as shepherds and shepherdesses. (Harris: 1997: 107)

Harris' critique of bear masculinity as contrived fails to consider that bears themselves often question the meaning of 'naturalness' in bear gender ideology and that bears recognize that they are not simply mimicking heterosexual gender norms. In this sense, Harris' derision of bear culture is quite similar to Sullivan's abundant praise for bears, which also assumes that bear masculinity is "indistinguishable" from heteronormative masculinity:

> Bears, after all, are the straight guys in gay culture. Their very ordinariness makes them both more at ease with regular straight guys; but their very ordinariness in some ways is also extremely culturally subversive. Drag queens, after all, are hardly the cutting edge any more. Straight people love their gay people flaming, or easily cordoned off from the straight experience. Bears reveal how increasingly difficult this is. Their masculinity is indistinguishable in many ways from straight male masculinity -- which accounts, in some ways, for their broader invisibility in the culture. They are both more integrated; and yet, by their very equation of regular masculinity with gayness, one of the more radical and transformative gay phenomena out there right now. (Sullivan 2008)

Both Sullivan and Harris assume that bear identity is modeled almost entirely upon heteronormative masculinity, although the two disagree on whether or not this is 'naturally natural' or simply a performance of 'natural' straight masculinity. However, the idea of 'naturalness' within bear culture is grounded less in assumptions about heterosexual men than in lesbian feminist writing about the hegemonic understandings of beauty and body image. As marginalization due to physical size was a crucial factor driving the emergence of bear identity, it is not particularly surprising that bears would turn to the extensive theorizing and activism of feminists who have a long tradition of dealing with these very same issues. As Wright notes:

> Going 'natural' is also taken directly from the feminist work of Andrea Dworkin, Mary Daly, and others. It is a transformative action on the part of the oppressed to reject being dominated by the beauty myth, to direct

> our anger at our oppressors, not ourselves, and to build community with like-minded fellows. In this sense, bears address the issue of class strictures based on looks-ism and fat discrimination. Heavy, unattractive people are discriminated against in our society, which often has direct economic consequences – being forced to take lower-end jobs, being shunned professionally and socially, being dismissed as asexual or unworthy or intimate affection. (Wright 1997b: 13)

Writers (like Harris and Sullivan) who assume that bear masculinity is bound up with heterosexual masculinity fail to recognize the full complexity of bear gender ideology in which gay male effeminacy is not viewed negatively (as with the presentation of the "q factor" in the bear codes). Views like those of Harris and Sullivan also entirely erase the extremely important role that feminist theory has played in the emergence of bear understandings of gender, placing heterosexual men at the center of bear identity, a position that is in direct opposition to a bear gender ideology in which activities such as cooking, knitting, and interior decorating are just as important as camping, hiking or watching football.

The emphasis on naturalness in bear culture contributes to the essentialization of bear identity. The idea that one is naturally a bear is regularly evoked in bear discourse and bears commonly argue that they felt ostracized and uncomfortable in gay male social settings until they discovered bear subculture. Similarly, claims to having a long-standing and natural attraction to larger hairy men are fairly common, as in the following example from the BML. In this posting, introducing himself to other member of the list in 1990, a contributor notes that his attraction to bears goes back to his youth, using the bear code as shorthand to describe his first crush on a bear:

9) ...When I was in my teen years I recall being very attracted to this beary guy (A definate B6 w+). We worked together every week outside. His shirt was off alot, displaying a layer of fur that I wanted to explore.

The idea that one is naturally a bear (or is naturally attracted to bears) is, to an extent, independent of gender ideology and does not necessarily imply that bear masculinity is innate. Bears are certainly open to varied gender display and are much more open to gay male effeminacy than other masculinist subcultures like leathermen or circuit boys. While leathermen and circuit boys both tend to avoid association with drag queens (who are seen as the epitome of effeminate behavior), drag performances are widely appreciated among bears and are a common occurrence at bear runs. At the 2009 Lazy Bear Weekend, for example, a play in which drag queens performed episodes of television program *The Golden Girls* was one of the main entertainment events. Similarly, at the annual International Bear Rendezvous in San Francisco, one of the main events is a bingo tournament to raise money for charity run entirely by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a group of drag queens who wear nuns' habits combined with outrageous exaggerated hairstyles and make-up (see Chapter Three). The ideological importance of naturalness in bear culture means that individuals should be accepted for who they are and should be themselves, even if that means being effeminate. As sociologist Eric Rofes has argued, bears are not always masculine in behavior despite the stereotype of bears as mimicking heteronormative masculinity:

> Bears as a group are simultaneously both gender-conforming and gender-nonconforming, or gender radicals. At any big gathering of Bears, there are men who are very comfortable looking like big gruff hairy bearded lumberjacks, all the while being total queens – silly and light and fun and warm – characteristics which men are not supposed to share with other men. (Suresha 2002: 15-6)

Thus, although bears typically dress in ways that typically index working-class heterosexual masculinity, bear culture is particularly open to gender variation. In the documentary *Bear Run*, a transgender bear name Mikhael who worked most of his life as

a truck driver and maintains a heterosexual relationship with his lesbian partner argues

that he has always been a bear despite being born female and being attracted to women:

> I've always been a bear. I don't know what's up with that. I was a bear
> before *I* knew I was a bear, that kind of ugly duckling effect or something.
> You know, the swan that didn't know it was a swan till it grew and
> everybody thought it was just an ugly duck. That's me. (Hunt 2008).

In the film, Mikhael's bear friends are particularly careful about accepting and supporting

both him as both transgender and bear. In one scene they discuss their concern that their

common use of feminine pronouns to refer to one another might be offensive to Mikhael.

Although they regularly refer to one another as *she/her* or *girlfriend*, they worry that

calling Mikhael *girlfriend* might imply that they do not fully accept him as a man because

he was born female. They are, however, quite careful to ensure that Mikhael realizes that

they in no way question the validity of his bear identity.

Thus, despite writers (like Sullivan) who see bears as subversive specifically

because they are indistinguishable from heterosexual men, bear culture often involves

gender variance that reflects fairly conventional gay male forms of gender resistance,

including the acceptance of men who might be viewed as effeminate. Rather than being

either a form of working-class masculine drag or a natural and unassuming (but

heteronormative) masculinity, bear gender ideology is highly reflexive and carefully

considered.

Discussions about gendered behavior were quite common on the BML,

sometimes sparked by postings that mocked effeminate behavior. The following example

on "bear elocution" occurred as part of a long joke about how becoming a bear meant

losing the effeminacy stereotypically associated with gay men:

10) Becoming a better bear means gaining some things and losing others. The first workshop will be devoted to the topic of Bearspeak. Our elocution lessons will teach you how to reduce your phonemic inventory and converse more effectively with your bear buddies. In two short days we'll purge your vocabulary of phrases like "Oh, you hateful bitch!" and "Puh-leeeeeze!" No more "Mary" this and "Mary" that. Say goodbye to sibilant speech. Soon your every utterance will be punctuated with "Bear" this and "Grrrr" that.

In addition to the flagrant misuse of linguistic terminology, this posting reinforces the stereotyped view that bears are thoroughly and unquestioningly masculine. However, entries of this sort, particularly criticisms of gay men who are effeminate, were typically met with anger over displays of prejudice that are counter to the bear ideology of acceptance. An extended thread in 1993, for example, debated the inclusion of "q" in the bear codes, and the fact that the codes did not allow for modifying "q" with pluses or minuses. In the following post, the contributor argues that if bears are truly accepting of all gendered behavior, modifying the "q-factor" should not be issue, suggesting that restricting the range of gendered behavior within the code conflicts with bear ideologies that stress accepting individuals for who they are:

11) I don't understand what all the fuss is about the q in NBCS. I don't think I've ever met a bear who really rates a q, at least not yet. Now if there were to be a modifier on the q, instead (say from q—being the most Butch redneck in the world to q++ being someone who sounds like they should be in La Cage Aux Folles), then maybe I would have ratings for people (and myself). As it is, I've already gotten in trouble once by saying to someone "you are really a q--," not realizing that no modifier was possible! (yes, that *was* you Dave.) Personally, I don't understand all the fuss on the postings here either. One of the things which most attracts me to the bear culture is that bears (at least as far as I've seen!) accept almost anything.

The extended discussion of effeminacy in 1993 regularly returned to the idea of acceptance and tolerance. Even contributors who attempted to assert their own masculine identity ran the risk of having their contributions to the list interpreted as potentially

alienating more effeminate bears. In the following interaction the first contributor raises the issue of distinguishing between effeminate behavior and participation in pastimes stereotypically associated with femininity. While the second contributor agrees with the idea that fears of being perceived as "feminine" prevent many men from learning useful skills (such as sewing or cooking), he criticizes the first author for using language that could be perceived as denigrating more effeminate bears:

12) <first posting> On the subject of the "q" classification, let's not confuse the "conventionally feminine" interests with "conventionally effeminate" behavior. [...] I've been sewing and cooking for most of my life. My partner, who fits most bear qualifications except for size, recently took an interest in sewing and is now producing beautiful shirts from unusual fabrics. We are both talking about trying more quilting. But neither of us is prone to "chiffon talk" or mincing about.

13) <response> I substantially agree with this: certainly American men are socialized out of most self-supporting skills necessary in an even rudimentary society: darning a sock, replacing a button, preparing meals, that sort of thing; as for arts finer than whittling (not to belittle whittling, of course), forget it. Except . . . well, terms like "chiffon-talk" an"mincing about" are both vague and contemptuous. People most often talk and move in ways that are comfortable to them (these are things you have to do every waking moment). It's unfair in a very basic way to speak about this sort of thing as if it were a character flaw.

Discussions of gender on the BML are often quite sophisticated in terms of their recognition of feminist and queer theory, which is often evoked to support the view of bear identity as a form of resistance. Contributors often refer to the performative nature of gender and the potential subversive character of gender non-conformity. In addition to challenging contributors for their lack of tolerance with respect to effeminate behavior, a failure to appreciate gay male effeminacy is seen as counter to bear subculture's potential to challenge forms of social dominance that are seen as oppressive to gay men in general and bears in

particular. In the following posting from the 1993 discussion on gender, the contributor argues that bear culture is founded in resistant to dominant forms of culture:

> 14) The purported logic of bear culture is in its claim of aesthetic resistance: it exists in opposition to dominant representations of gay desire in pornography, advertising, or any image that valorizes smoothness, sculpted muscles and perpetual youth. For individuals, bear identity-as-resistance has its origins in the personal. It may be traced to a moment of dramatic rejection: a scowl or harsh words in a bar, bookstore or sex club. Or the hurt endured from a discouraging frown in reaction to a cruisy stare on a subway platform. Or the brutal memory of being barred from a club for being too old or too heavy. These instances of rejection and resistance inform the perception of being at odds with the desires of the dominant culture.

The contributor goes on to argue that the "model of inclusion" that lead many men to find bear culture as a place of acceptance is continually challenged by diversity within bear culture that leads some men to feel marginalized by other bears either because of gender expression, class, or ethnicity. He concludes that effeminate bears should be embraced and that the normative character emerging in bear culture must be continually challenged:

> 15) What do I suggest? Aside from burning copies of Bear magazine, I would say bring on the Barbie bears, beauty bears, glam bears, and each and every china-collecting queen. Fortunately for us, they are already here; unfortunately, their presence is a point of contention for many self-identified bears. So instead of revising bear self-identity, perhaps we should playfully question the erotic codes deployed by the bear cultural regime.

These examples from the BML suggest that bears are not blindly mimicking heterosexual masculinity. The 'naturalness' of bear masculinity is consciously performed, widely discussed, and regularly challenged by members of the bear community. While bears may index masculinity through dress and body type, there are definitely bears who simultaneously challenge hegemonic understandings of masculinity through the use of

camp style and stereotypically gay mannerisms that are in opposition to heteronormative masculinity.

2.4   Bear sightings and citations of desire

BML differed from other mailing lists of the late 1980s and early 1990s in terms of the typical genres represented in list postings. For example, flames (postings that are hostile, insulting or aggressive) were rare on BML. This is not surprising, given that displays of aggression conflict with bear ideologies of masculinity. In addition to genres like introductions, queries, and discussions, BML regular included a genre known as "bear sightings" in which contributors described seeing men they found attractive who exemplified the bear physical ideal. The men described are usually straight and do not self-identity as bears, but merit "woofing" because of their attractiveness. Bear sightings fell into two broad categories: those describing media figures or celebrities and those describing everyday men seen in public settings.

Bear sightings of men in everyday contexts typically describe the physical size and body hair of the potential bear in detail, so that their bearishness is clear to other readers. In the following example from 1990, the contributor emphasizes the hairiness of a man in front of him at the grocery store checkout counter:

16) I wound up in line behind this WOOFTERFUL Bear... Jet black hair and beard, furry legs (he was wearing shorts) and furry arms, fuzz coming over the collar of his t-shirt. He looked to be at least partially from the Middle Eastern gene-pool -- Turkish, Arab, Persian, Armenian, &c. -- with that dark skin and almost blue-black hair. Rowr!

What set me off into fantasyland was that on top of his handsome, furry face and husky bod was the fact that the t-shirt he was wearing bore an image of a teddy bear and the words ``I'm Huggable'' -- AND the fact he was buying [among other things] a box of MAXX condoms. In case you're not familiar with 'em, they're designed with extra... er.... ``headroom'' for those guys who are particularly well endowed. GROWF!

The author refers to the man's facial or body hair six times in the posting, also noting that he has a husky bod. The description of the man's t-shirt also serves in the construction of bear identity. The phrase "I'm huggable" indexically associates the potential bear with bear sociality, particularly the importance of physical touch in casual (non-sexual) interactions. That is, bears enjoy touching one another, hugging one another, and holding one another.

Other bear sightings evoke the working-class orientation of bear culture by focusing on working class men. These posts may also describe physical spaces where bears may be sighted in large numbers. In the following post (also from 1990), the contributor describes places were working-class "bears" may be seen on the campus of the University of Georgia (UGA):

17) First place to go to is by our main library where they have the construction going on. I've spotted 3 HOT bears there. One operates the crane (is that how you call that long thick *ahem* thing where it lifts heavy weights and brings it from one place to another?) and he's by far my number WOOF target. Maybe the phallic machine that he's operating has something to do with it? :)

Second place to go is around the pharmacy building and school of forestry. Not only is there another road construction going on, but yummy looking guys from forestry schools also frequent those roads.

Third place is any UGA physical plant pick-up trucks. As the now-gone bear friend here said once that UGA "makes masculinity a requirement in hiring people in the physical plant." WOOF! My knee wobbled at more than one WOOFIE bear in those trucks.

These bear sightings reinforce the connections between physical types, social class and interactional norms associated with emergent bear identity.

Bear sightings involving public figures also reinforce similar working-class associations. Although a few celebrity bear sightings simply listed various men that the

contributor found attractive, most focused on a single man. The typical structure of a bear

sighting involves introducing the "bear" and where he was seen, describing him (or

simply noting that he is attractive) and telling other readers of the list where the man in

question can be found. The following example from 1995 (BML 40) appeared after a

number of bear sightings involving performers seen on Country Music Television

(CMT):

18) Recent bear-sightings on CMT:
    Many have been mentioning Aaron Tippin and others on CMT. Next time
    you see an Alan Jackson video, have a look for the guy in his band who
    plays electric guitar. WOOF-O-RAMA! He appears *very* briefly near
    the end of the Summertime Blues video with little clothing and covered in
    mud! Since Jackson has his band members in many of his videos, this is a
    bear to look out for...

The author follows the regular pattern of introducing the bear, noting that he is attractive

(WOOF-O-RAMA!) and informing others about where he can be found. The author notes

excitement that the guitarist is "covered in mud", a fact that reinforces bear ideologies of

masculinity as natural and unrestrained. The descriptions of men in bear sightings

typically go into more detail, usually focusing on the man's beard or chest hair. Although

sexual objectification is often associated with male discourse that indexes masculinity

(e.g. Kiesling 2001), the language used in bear sightings often include forms of camp that

are typically interpreted as indexing femininity. In the following example, also from

1995, the author describes a photograph of (television actor and former professional

football player) Fred Dryer using the camp trope of treating a quotidian interaction as

performance:

19) Hello, Bear Fans, this is your roving reporter (or should that be 'raving
    reporter?') with yet another sensational Ursine sighting -- this one in the
    annals of daily journalism. Look on page 3D of today's (4/27/95 -

> Thursday) USA Today. You can't miss it; just find Connie Chung and look south! A shirtless Fred Dryer! Talk about a bodaciously hairy set of ta-tas! Ka-Thump, Ka-Thump, Ka-Thump -- my heart beats loudly. Dark glasses... Receding hairline... Tatoo... [sic] His nips look T and E -- that's Taut and Erect to you uninitiated. Ultimately delectable. Run -- don't walk -- to your nearest newsstand.

The author begins with language that indexes the stance of a sports or news reporter (*Bear Fans, your roving reporter*), marking the speech as a conscious performance. The repeated use of exclamation marks, the inclusion of sound effects (Ka-thump) and the reference to advertising in the final line (*Run – don't walk*) all index the type of exaggerated citational performance associated with camp (Harvey 2002).

Although they may be presented in a camp style, celebrity bear sightings typically reinforced bear ideologies of desire that privilege working-class masculinity. The public figures in bear sightings are almost universally associated with working-class tastes, including figures from country music, football, professional wrestling, or popular television shows (like *Home Improvement* or *Magnum P.I.*). Although working-class men have long been eroticized among gay men, celebrity bear sightings link desire for working-class men with the enjoyment of working-class forms of entertainment. Thus, in addition to conveying the idea that working-class men are sexually desirable, celebrity bear sightings suggest that the observer participates in working-class pastimes. This allows the bear observer to index working-class sensibilities as part of their own identity.

Bear sightings are important in challenging the dominant ideologies of desire in gay culture, which marginalize heavyset and hairy men. Like *BEAR* magazine, these bear sightings provide a set of citations involving contexts in which larger, hairy men are contextually positioned as objects of desire. Given that many men who are drawn to bear identity have experienced rejection and sexual isolation within the gay community, the

sightings create a social context in which they can recognize themselves as sexually attractive. As such, they play a crucial role in both formulating bear resistance to "body fascism" and in making bear identity desirable for men who have been excluded from dominant gay contexts.

3.0   Appropriations of class and region in bear discourse

3.1   Bear appropriations of class

The ideology of 'naturalness' permeates bear culture and distinguishes it from other gay male subcultures that emphasize meticulous self-presentation and conscious performance. However, there are certainly normative assumptions about what it means to be natural that revolve around rejecting middle-class conventions and adopting a working-class style. The working-class orientation is often seen as a conscious effort to performatively assert a masculine identity and to draw on ideologies linking sexuality and class (see Ortner 2006). However, the move to index working-class masculinity is also directly related to the issues of body size. In discussing the possibility of fat and weight being a form of masculine drag, Lawrence Mass suggests that the relationship between weight and masculinity is not unique to bear culture:

> For many gay men, bigness has always been a feature of masculinity. Why and where that comes from I'm not sure, but women view bigness similarly. One archetype of masculinity is bigness – for example, football players, construction workers, weightlifters. One the other hand, plenty of gay men are attracted to pretty boys, mainly because they see them as masculine. (Suresha 2002: 178-9).

Bear appropriation of working-class signs exploits associations between class, body type, and masculinity in broader social discourse. Through indexical analogy, bears are able to adopt elements of working-class culture in order to index a masculine identity, allowing men to view themselves as sexually attractive despite the fact that they are highly

marginalized within gay culture because of their weight or hairiness. Within dominant gay male ideologies of the body, heavyset men are typically viewed as "soft" and naturally effeminate, while within heterosexual ideologies heavyset men are clearly masculine as long as they are working class or use their size in physical labor or athletics. As working-class men may be simultaneously seen as overweight and masculine, it is not surprising that bears would adopt a working-class aesthetic.

Bear culture is indeed overflowing with signs that index working-class identity. Bear erotica and pornography almost always involves working-class contexts or characters. Film titles include *Big Bear Trucking Company, Country Bears in Heat*, *Grease Monkey Bears*, and *Workman's Compensation*. The covers of early issues of *BEAR* magazine usually portray men in baseball caps, often wearing shirts with the sleeves torn off, both clothing styles that index white working-class identity in the United States. The eroticized working class images in bear magazines reflect broader stereotypes of working-class style as evidence by public figures such as Larry the Cable Guy (a comedian who performs as part of the "Blue Collar Comedy Tour")[3]. The following pictures contain some of the most common features that overlap between bear and working-class style: baseball caps, torn shirt sleeves, facial hair and in the case of American Bear, a tractor:

Figure 4.2: *American Bear* magazine   Figure 4.3: Larry the Cable Guy

There are also t-shirts marketed to bears that modify the commercial logos of companies associated with the working class, such as *John Bear* (based on the John Deere farm equipment company) and *Bear Depot* (based on the Home Depot hardware store). There are two bear cookbooks, both by P. J. Gray, that include numerous working-class references. The first volume includes "Serving suggestion: with beer" after every recipe (including desserts), referring to the bear and working-class preference for beer. The second volume notes that "no bear kitchen is complete" without microwave popcorn, bisquick (an instant biscuit mix), Velveeta (cheese), cornflakes, cream of mushroom soup, ground beef, or cool whip. With the possible exception of microwave popcorn and cornflakes, all of these foods are stereotypically associated with white working-class dietary habits. The recipes are also rooted in stereotypes of the white working class. Examples include "hobo hash," "cheesy sausage balls," "potato chip cookies," "candy bar smoothies," "bacon hash browns," and "tater tot casserole." The class orientations of bear culture are evident in a poster for a party in Los Angeles sponsored by Redneck Bear, a clothing company that sells clothes intended for the bear community (see below):
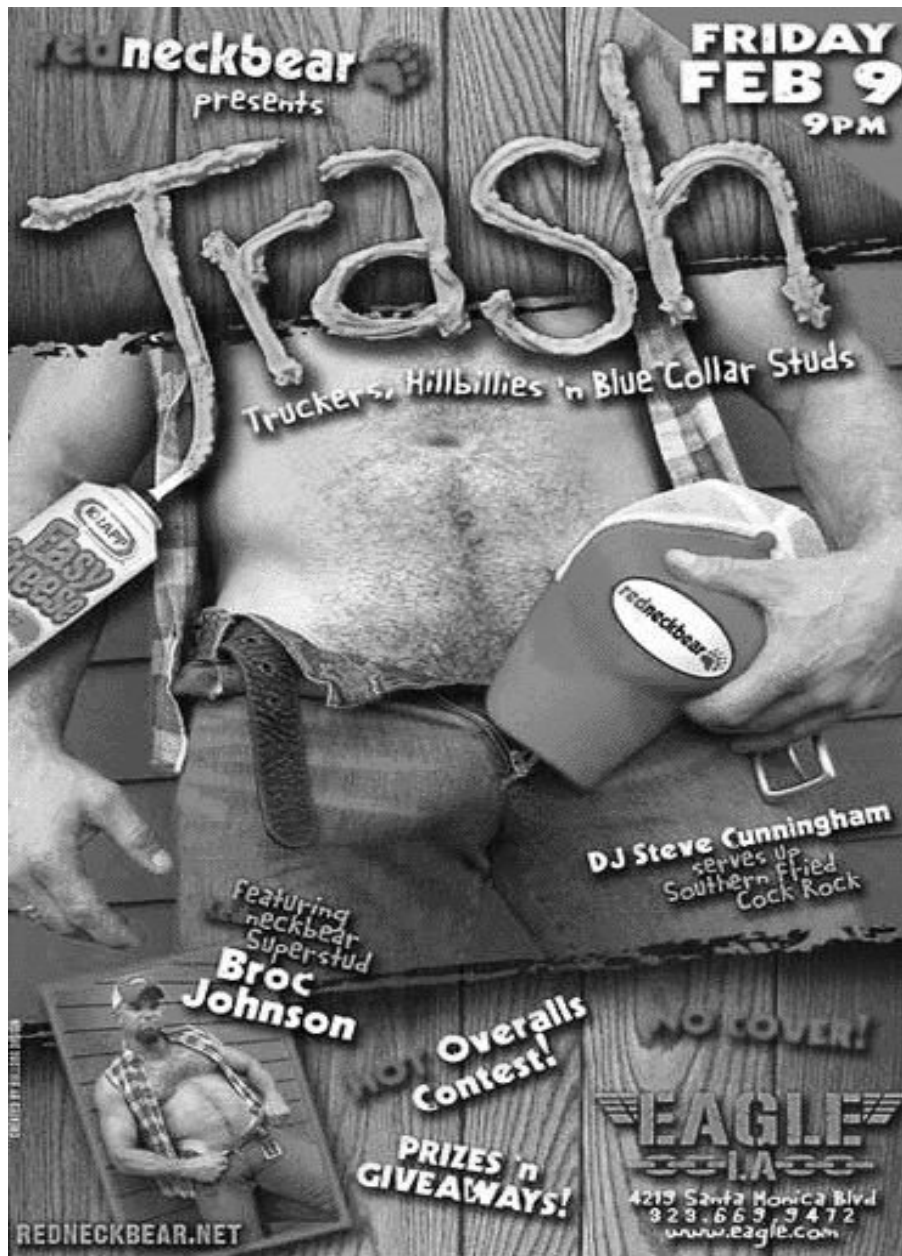
Figure 4.4: Flier for "Trash" party at the Los Angeles Eagle (2007)

The party is called "Trash," a play on the "white trash" slur used against the white working class and the party claims to be intended for "truckers, hillbillies, and blue-collar studs." The title of the party is written in canned spray cheese (often associated with the white working class), the music is "Southern fried rock," and there is a "Hot overalls contest." All of these signs index stereotypes of Southern white working-class men.

Just as ideologies of gender are highly contested and widely discussed among bears, bears regularly consider the social implications of their appropriation of working-class culture. Eric Rofes raised the issue of class in the first collection published on bear theory (Wright's *The bear book*):

> I observe the participation of middle-class, upper-middle-class, and upper-class men in the rapidly expanding and diversifying subcultures of Bears with great interest. How have we come to comprise a large portion of a community whose symbols, rituals, references and collective culture appear rooted in working-class, white trash, and lower-middle-class populations? What does it mean that we wear grease monkey suits, sleeveless sweatshirts, combat fatigues, thermal underwear, or football jerseys? How have specific artifacts and symbols of white working-class masculinities become a part of the collective landscape of middle-class bears' imaginations? (Rofes 1997: 90)

In particular, Rofes questions the social meaning of bear appropriations from the working class. Rofes interprets this appropriation in terms of Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic violence* , suggesting that middle-class bear appropriations of working-class signs might reinforce and contribute to the social domination of the working class:

> Are middle-class Bears imposters, theatrically assuming the costumes and body hexis of working-class men?...Is a contemporary American culture of yuppies in country-western wear, white adolescents in modified gansta-rap gear, and queer academics and computer technocrats in workingmen's clothing simply sublimating (or exacerbating?) class warfare through masquerade? And what kinds of symbolic violence are visited upon authentically poor and working class men through these attempts at impersonation and ventriloquism? (Rofes 1997: 92)

Rofes suggests that the working-class orientation of bear culture may be no different from other types of appropriation from socially marginalized groups, arguing that white middle-class men who suffer from both anxieties over economic security and discrimination based on sexual orientation "may be drawn to Bear spaces and texts as site for a reaffirmation of class privilege (and race privilege) through the apparent discovery

of "comfort" and erotic fulfillment in the celebration of white working-class masculinities." (Rofes 1997: 97)

The view of bear culture as attractive for white middle-class men because it reaffirms class and race privilege raises the issue of the response to bear culture from working-class men and men of color. One might expect that the middle-class appropriations common in bear culture could alienate working-class men and many read Rofes' discussion of class as suggesting exactly that. However, there are numerous (white) working-class men who self-identify as bears. Indeed, there are perhaps more white working-class men involved in bear subculture than in leather or circuit subculture. In his discussion of Provincetown's Bear Week, Sullivan argues against the stereotype of all bears as middle-class men dressing up like straight working-class men:

> Upper middle class and middle class bears tend to idealize the working class stiff; and working class bears, for the first time perhaps, find their natural state of physical being publicly celebrated rather than ignored. I made a point of asking multiple bears during Bear Week what they did for a living. Yes, there were architects and designers and writers. But there were also computer technicians, delivery truck drivers, construction workers, salesmen, and so on. Again, what we're seeing, I think, is another manifestation of the growth and breadth of gay culture in the new millennium. (Sullivan 2008)

Although Sullivan sees the inclusion of working-class men as a broadening of gay culture, it is unreasonable to assume that there have not always been working-class gay men. Working-class gay men have, however, been highly marginalized by gay culture, particularly in the post-Stonewall era. It is this very marginalization that makes bear identity attractive to some working-class men. In an interview with Ron Suresha, Rofes raises this possibility in response to those who assume that bear culture alienates working-class men:

> But I disagree with people…who argue that working-class men do not feel comfortable in this subculture. Working-class men have been part of this subculture – in fact, have been part of building this subculture – for a while. For a lot of my friends who are lower-middle class, or working class who were raised poor, Bear spaces are the only sites where they feel comfortable. Now, I'm sure there are some working-class guys who respond to all these middle-class guys, all these doctors and lawyers pretending to be stevedores and dock workers and stuff. But truly speaking, I think the working-class people are more comfortable because those sites look more like the places they came from. And I think this is particularly true for rural men. In my year living in Maine, I found there were a lot of Bears living there, many of whom don't even know they're Bears. It's just the way Maine men look. (Suresha 2002: 11)

Given that much of gay culture is oriented towards middle-class aspirations, working class men may find bear culture a welcoming space in which they are not only accepted, but highly valued.[4] However, bear appropriations may make some working-class men uncomfortable in bear social contexts. As with the bear sightings, Rofes comment about bears who "don't even know they're bears" serves to essentialize bear identity as independent of actual participation in bear culture by allowing the identity label to apply to men who may very well be heterosexuals who have never even heard of bear subculture.

In terms of men of color and the question of race privilege, bears have had a similarly mixed reaction. In the United States, bear identity is not uncommon among Latino and Arab American men, but Asian American, Native American and (especially) African American bears are much rarer (see Suresha 2002: 256ff). Like issues of gender and class, questions of race are regularly considered in bear culture and books in "bear theory" usually contain discussions by bears of color concerning the issue of race within the bear community. There are various reasons why bears of color might not find bear culture particularly attractive. Asian and Native American bears, who may be less likely

to have large amounts of body hair, may find the emphasis on hairiness among bears alienating. For all minority bears, the emphasis on white working-class culture may also be alienating. Although bear culture involves a range of working-class elements, it is particularly focused on Southern, rural, "hillbilly" working-class culture. Given the widespread stereotype of working-class Southerners as racists and the history of racism in the South, it may be that the predominance of signs indexing Southern working-class identity indexically evokes racism regardless of the actual attitudes towards race that individual bears may have.

3.2 Regional identity and Mock Hillbilly

The appropriation of Southern rural identities is one area that bears have not written about extensively. However, stereotypes of Southerners, particularly "hillbillies," are so common in bear culture that critics of bears have suggested that bears are performing some sort of hillbilly drag. Harris, a strong critic of bears (and every other gay subculture), uses the hillbilly stereotype to criticize the lack of authenticity in bear culture:

> If you skin the bear, you find, not a toothless hillbilly with a shotgun and a still, but the typical age-obsessed queen with a subscription to *House Beautiful* and a Japanese tea garden. Just as the tattoo has become a brooch, so the bear's fur is really a mink stole. It is ultimately impossible to imprison the bourgeois body, to deprive it of its lotions, starve it of its eaux de colognes and depilatories, and stuff it in the hair shirt of apelike masculinity (Harris 1997:108)

Although bears certainly don't present themselves as "toothless hillbillies," representations of the working-class in the bear imagination are closely tied with negative stereotypes associated with poor and rural Southerners, through categories such as *white trash*, *rednecks*, and *hillbillies*. It may be that these stereotypes are imagined some

prototypical form of white working-class culture, making them obvious choices for indexing working-class identity. As noted, there are numerous examples of bear appropriations tied to regional identity. Bear music is predominantly country or bluegrass music historically associated with the South. In Gray's bear cookbooks (Gray 2003, 2005), Southern recipes figure predominantly, including biscuits and gravy, peach pie, hush puppies, and "Kentucky pie" (basically a pecan pie with Bourbon added). The "Redneck Bear" company markets t-shirts and baseball caps featuring themes related to redneck and hillbilly stereotypes. The company's logo features the "stars and bars" of the Confederate flag, evoking the stereotype of rednecks as inherently racist. The company's products include camouflage t-shirts with "INBRED" or "HICK" written on them. The Southern "hillbilly" stereotype also surfaces in the language used by participants on the BML, which often involves what might be called Mock Hillbilly.

BML contributors frequently use non-standard orthographies (such as *yer* for *your/you're*) that index working-class, Southern, and rural identities. Although many participants on the BML never use non-standard orthographies in their postings, the practice is fairly common and occurs elsewhere in informal bear writing. In a paper called "Now yer talkin' Bear," John Moran noted the use of similar orthographic practices in *BEAR* magazine (Moran 1991). The non-standard spellings used on the BML are those typically used to represent forms of Appalachian and Ozark speech stereotypically associated with "hillbilly" identity, such as the spellings used in the Mock Hillbilly of comic strips like *Li'l Abner* or *Barney Google and Snuffy Smith*. Some of the spellings represent actual dialectal variation, but others are examples of eye dialect (Ives 1950, Preston 1982, 1985). Preston (1982) describes eye-dialect as follows:

> …forms such as *sez* and *wuz* are known as EYE-DIALECT – forms which reflect no phonological difference from their standard counterparts *says* and *was*. These last forms serve mainly to denigrate the speaker so represented by making him or her appear boorish, uneducated, rustic, gangsterish, and so on, and it is the claim of this study that nearly ALL respellings share in this defamation of character. (Preston 1985: 328)

Although Preston argues that examples of eye-dialect (indeed, all non-standard spellings) are intended to denigrate speakers of non-standard varieties, the contributors to the BML do not use respellings (including eye-dialect) to represent the speech of some other group, but typically use non-standard spellings as a form of self-presentation. The non-standard orthographies on the BML include a mix of eye-dialect and forms that seem intended to represent "hillbilly" speech (e.g. *figger* for *figure*, *kin* for *can*, etc). Common dialect forms include *yer* for *your/you're* and *fer* for *for*, both of which seem to represent a reduced (schwa) vowel, a common feature in the casual speech of most speaker of American English. Other forms, like *wuz* for *was* and *wunderful* for *wonderful*, do not represent any distinction from the pronunciation in standard American English. Another common feature is to represent the –*ing* suffix as ending with an alveolar rather than velar nasal (e.g. –*in'* or –*in*), another feature that is typical of casual speech in all American dialects.

In some cases, the respellings produce a form of double-voicing (Bakhtin 1981) that could be interpreted as representing the speech of someone other than the author himself, as in the following example (from 1995) in which the contributor is discussing a gay country music singer. After explaining how he ran across the bearish singer while shopping for CDs, the author describes the singer's music as follows:

20) If a cowboy bear with a good, warm, MALE voice and good band who's singin' 'bout his daddy, his BOYfriend what done left him but thass awright 'cuz he's done gone out an' he's kickin' up his heels with a buncha

> other fellers, AND fallin' in love in a pickup truck headed for California
> with a big butch baby with brown eyes isn't self-explanatory, there's no
> use in trying to figger it out.

Some of the respellings represent Southern speech (*thass awright* for *that's all right* and *figger* for *figure*), but others are general casual speech forms common to most dialects of American English (*in'* for *ing* and *an'* for *and*). The posting also includes non-standard grammar that reflects stereotypes of Southern (particularly "hillbilly") speech. Indeed, the phrase *he's done gone out an' he's kickin' up his heels* is ungrammatical in Southern speech and clearly marks a non-native speaker producing an exaggerated stereotype. In Southern White Vernacular English and African American English (see Green 2002), the completive aspect marker *done* normally occurs without the auxiliary *has* (e.g. *he done gone*) unless the sentence is intended to be emphatic, in which case the auxiliary occurs in the full form (e.g. *he HAS done gone* [or *HAVE done gone* in African American English). The use of a contracted auxiliary (*he's done gone out*) is quite awkward and very atypical of dialects where the completive aspect marker *done* occurs. Moreover, the combination of the completive marker *done* with progressive *he's kickin' up his heels* does not make sense as the "going out" would have to be entirely completed, but the (progressive) "kicking up heels" is on-going. Although the non-standard speech is presented in the author's own voice (as the singer is in the third person), the non-standard forms only occur in the discussion of the singer (and not in the rest of the posting). Thus, the non-standard spelling and grammar index the singer's identity rather than that of the author, adding to the construction of the singer as a "bear" by marking him as rural and working-class.

Most examples of non-standard orthographies and grammar are presented as the representing the authors' own language. In the posting below, for example, the author (who is from Massachusetts) uses the words *mosey* and *if'n*, both associated with "hillbilly" speech:

21) But that was years and years ago; nowadays I have to turn to the Country Music channel or mosey on down to the hardware store if'n I want to get a glimpse of some real bear between not-quite-monthly visits with Stephen.

In the following example (from 1994), the author uses respellings in discussing a relationship that has gone sour:

22) I've been datin this dude, well, er, I guess jes hangin out, since June. Things were gettin kinda heavy fer awhile, but I never really saw the signs. Like, say, the night he was down at the bar and calls me about midnite and asks if he kin come over. I dunno, mebbe not_that_ bad...but I wuz hung up major big time on the dude. He wuz gettin real deep inside, and stuff.

Here, the author uses eye-dialect (*fer* for *for* and *wuz* for *was*) and other respellings (*mebbe* for *maybe*, *jes* for *just*, *kin* for *can*, etc) to represent his own speech. Of course, the use of eye-dialect does not reflect any actual forms in the author's speech, but it is highly unlikely that any of the other respellings reflect naturally-occurring forms for the author either. In another posting by the same author (from the same year), he presents himself as neither Southern nor working-class, referring to himself as a "beer snob":

23) Okay gang, I've lurked around long enuf! Yeah, my intro wuz posted back in March, but I've been quiet fer so long...

Now you've made it to the topic that I consider myself the eternal student of: BEER!! (Didn't Jesus say something about 'When any two or more are gathered in the name of beer'?!? If not, he wuz misquoted!)

;{)#

I am the bartender's bane that when walking into a bar I've never been to before, will ask, "What kind of non-industrial beer do you have?"

> Luckily, the LoneStar carries Sierra Nevada Pale Ale and you kin find Guiness in several bars in San Francisco. I guess you can consider me a barfly and a beer snob. Unfortunately, in gay bars this doesn't seem to cut it...<sigh>.

Although the author uses eye-dialect (*enuf* for *enough* and more uses of *wuz*), his writing style changes dramatically in the final paragraph (following the emoticon representing a winking, smiling face with a moustache and a beard). Although beer is the drink of choice for bears because of its association with the working class, asking a bartender "What kind of non-industrial beer do you have?" clearly indexes a middle-class identity. In a rural Southern context, this question would likely provoke laughter (if not violence). The use of eye-dialect as a form of self-presentation by a middle-class man from San Francisco serves to indexically link the author with the working class without actually claiming to be working class himself.

The combination of writing in a style that indexes a lack of sophistication or education with decidedly middle-class sensibilities is also seen in the following posting (from 1995) about potentially using the bear codes to convey the sort of bear one desires in addition to representing one's self:

24) (Here's my patentable suggestion for using bearcodes, which I'll give away: let's not just list our own. How about following it with an "ISO" code, so others can know at a glance not just who you are, but what yer looking for, as well?

I.e.: Me: B0 t+ f- w g+ k+ e+ c(d-) r p (I ferget the rest)
ISO: B0-6 (or so) >t >=(f w g k) d++ >=e+ >=r

In other words, I like 'em big, hairy, touchy, dominant, and outdoorsy. I don't know of a code for well-read, but that would help, too. After all, you've got to be able to talk in the morning.

Here the use of *yer*, *ferget*, and *I like 'em big* index working-class identity, although the author states that he is searching for a partner who is well-read, suggesting that the author considers himself educated and sophisticated despite representing his own speech with Mock Hillbilly.

The combination of non-standard orthographies with middle-class sensibilities creates indexical disjunctures that distinguish bears from both heterosexual working-class men and gay men who may have middle-class aspirations. These indexical disjunctures often involve combining non-standard respellings with language that indexes gay and/or middle-class identities, as in the following example (from 1995):

25) I respond well to: older, educated, aggressive, somewhat intimidating, well hung men who do not smoke. Furriness is wunderful, but not a fetish. Confidence, savoir faire, and a capacity for rough affection are BIG stimulants.

In this example, the author uses the eye-dialect form *wunderful* (for *wonderful*) with the French borrowing *savoir faire* in the following sentence. The use of French is a traditional characteristic of camp style used to index an aristocratic stance as a form of parody (Harvey 2000: 243, 2002:1153). The combination of French (indexing sophistication and aristocracy) with eye-dialect indexing a lack of education and sophistication, produces an indexical disjuncture. This disjuncture allows the author to index working-class and upper/middle-class identities in succession to convey bear working-class orientation without fully marking himself as truly middle-class.

Bear indexical disjunctures may also combine respellings with stereotypically gay forms, as in the following example from 1994:

26) THANX to all my SouthBay buddies for makin my last Wednesday Bingo/Bear nite a serious drunken extravaganza!

> The cake was fab (Thanx, Troy...what wuz that Bear made out of anyway?!?) and the company...well...the usual <snicker>. Yer all tops in my book!! Four stars...(really!)<g>.

Here, the author combines stereotypically gay male lexical items like *extravaganza* and *fab* (i.e. *fabulous*) with forms of eye-dialect that index working-class identity (*wuz* and *yer*). This mix of signs that index working-class and gay male identities is a hallmark of bear identity. Postings to the BML may go even further, drawing from a wide range of indexical signs, as in the following example from 1995 (CC Tx refers to the city of Corpus Christi, Texas where the author was attending the annual meeting of the American Library Association):

27) Oy Vey!! I'm glad I don't have your nerve in my tooth - yer a kinky li'l pervert! Uh, look me up if yer ever cursed w/travelling to CC Tx - ask at the Hidden Door, they'll tell ya where to find me. (Um, don't pay ANY attention to the rumors of a parking deck being built adjacent to my bedroom, or of the apartment downstairs being redecorated with an enforced ceiling - they're lies, all lies!!) I've got an addition to the list of Cons:

If you're travelling with someone else, and you and a bear de jour decide to fuck your brains out like a couple of weasels, be considerate of your travelling companion trying to sleep in the next bed (when he starts to holler "Will you two shuttup fucking so damn loud!!!!") - throw another pillow at him to put over his head!!

The author of this posting begins with *Oy Vey!!* which typically indexes Jewish identity, quickly switching into the non-standard orthographies that index rural Southern working-class identity (*yer, li'l*). The parenthetical statement includes forms typical of the conscious performance and exaggeration associated with camp citations of femininity, including the emphasis on *ANY* and the final *lies, all lies!!* (see Harvey 2002). The opening sentence in the second paragraph combines a French borrowing *de jour* which indexes middle-class sophistication with the contrastingly coarse *fuck your brains out*.

These indexical disjunctures allow contributors to the BML to index a polyphonous identity in which working-class signs are woven together with forms that index gay and middle-class identities. Much like the use of "white women's language" by African American drag queens is used to index a middle-class identity that the drag queens themselves do not necessarily claim for themselves (see Chapter One), the use of eye-dialect and non-standard orthography and grammar allows bears to index a working-class identity without actually intending to represent themselves as working-class.

4.0 Conclusion

Bear appropriations of working-class signs demonstrate that sexual identity need not be expressed only through gender. Forms that index gender in bear culture include both normative and non-normative stances towards the expression of gender identity. Bears may dress like working-class heterosexual men while calling each other "girlfriend" and using feminine pronouns. In addition to male-oriented activities like camping or watching sports, bears participate in activities typically associated with women, like cooking, knitting, or sewing. This suggest that bear identity is founded in class as much as (if not more than) in gender.

Although there have been numerous attempts to create welcoming spaces for overweight gay men, none have been nearly as successful as the bear movement. The linking of body type with working-class signs allows bears to reposition large bodies within a context in which weight can be interpreted as an index of masculinity and sexual desirability. Following the lead of feminist writers who challenge hegemonic domination over women's bodies, bear use their working-class orientation as a form of resistance against dominant gay-male ideologies of desire that marginalize heavyset men. Through

the use of eye-dialect, non-standard orthographies, and Mock Hillbilly, some contributors to the BML indexically link themselves with the Southern working class while maintaining their own middle-class identities.

Although eye-dialect, non-standard respelling are almost always used to denigrate marginalized social groups, the bear use of Mock Hillbilly is not so straight-forward. The fact that bears use these forms of language to represent themselves suggests that one can exploit potential indexical meanings of mock varieties as a potential form of resistance. Much like Elaine Chun's work on the use of Mock Asian by comedian Margaret Cho (Chun 2008), the bear use of Mock Hillbilly is open to competing interpretations. Although it may be offensive to some to see forms historically associated with the marginalization of Southern mountain populations, the use of Mock Hillbilly is integral to bear resistance to hegemonic ideologies within the gay community that marginalize both heavyset and working-class gay men.

1. *Felice di essere groso, contento di essere peloso, orgoglioso di essere omosessuale.*

2. Although the bear flag is sometimes interpreted as representing the colors of actual bear fur, it includes a stripe that matches the typical skin color of white people which does not occur in the fur of bears in nature.

3. Larry the Cable Guy has also been criticized for appropriating and performing a stereotyped Southern working-class identity when he actually from Nebraska (i.e. he is not Southern).

4. Particularly for Southern white gay men who have emigrated from the South, bear culture may be attractive because it highly values rural Southern identities that are often stigmatized in hegemonic (white) gay culture outside of the South.

CHAPTER FIVE

Down the K-hole: Circuit Boy Language Ideology, Camp Masculinity, and Linguistic Differentiation

1.0   Tragic

At the (1997) New Orleans Halloween ball, the center of the dance floor is crowded with shirtless men dancing. Most have white t-shirts tucked into the waistband of their low-rise jeans and are holding bottles of water as they dance. The men in this party nucleus are almost all exceptionally muscular white men with the same shade of salon tan and the same short haircuts. A few of the men are wearing wings made of white or black feathers attached to their backs with suspenders. In the periphery, the crowds diversifies somewhat and there are men wearing the expected Halloween costumes. Most of the men in the periphery are in cliques with costumes that all match one another. One clique is dressed as the coaching staff of the University of South Carolina (Fighting Cocks) football team. They are wearing matching polo shirts embroidered with COCKS in larger letters with specific coaching positions beneath, such as "Head Coach," "Wide Receiver Coach," or "Tight End Coach." One clique in matching tight white shorts and feathered wings drifts back and forth between the nucleus of shirtless men in jeans and the other cliques in the periphery. There are a few men in drag, but certainly not as many as one would expect at a gay men's Halloween ball in New Orleans.

As I turn in the hallway in search of the restrooms, I am pushed back against the wall by the only woman I have seen in the building, a paramedic pulling a stretcher behind her. A young man wearing a giant cereal box reading "Trix" is running alongside

her, crying as he leads her down the hallway to the spot where his partner lies unconscious on the floor. His partner is wearing a matching cereal box that reads "Special K." The cereal boxes are references to club drugs, with "Special K" being slang for ketamine (a horse tranquilizer) and "Trix" being slang for a variety of (different colored) pills (similar to the slang use of "Skittles"). The young men in cereal boxes are *tragic*, circuit slang for anything that is "terribly unfashionable" (Weems 2008: 18). Something *tragic* is the opposite of *fierce,* a word borrowed from drag queen slang for something that is exceptionally good or stylish (see Chapter Two, Weems 2008: 18). Although public representations of circuit parties typically focus on the use of club drubs among attendees, wearing a costume that celebrates specific drugs is tragically unfierce. Overdosing alone would suggest a tragic lack of sophistication about how to take club drugs without ending the party in the emergency room (or morgue), but overdosing while wearing a cereal box celebrating the drug that put your life in danger is tragedy squared. The men in the nucleus of the dance floor, with their matching abdominal muscles and matching water bottles, are fierce in contrast. Although most of them are probably taking the very same drugs, their focus is on the music, the dancing, and the spiritual experience of being surrounded by other sweaty and shirtless men who equally fierce. The majority of the men at the party are in the periphery, somewhere between the elite crowd of fierce muscle boys and the tragic figure overdosing outside the restroom in the hallway.

The physical spaces at the Halloween Ball reflect the social stratification of men who attend circuit parties. As a sexual marketplace, the circuit has a clear class of elites that embrace the stereotype of circuit boys as body-obsessed shallow men dancing and having casual sex while taking multiple drugs. Although this stereotype has lead to

widespread criticism of circuit parties in gay-oriented media (see Signorile 1998) and a general pathologization of circuit boys as promoting drug use and unprotected sex (see Kurtz 2005, Mansergh et al. 2001, Mattison et al. 2001, Ross et al. 2003), the men who most closely fit the stereotyped image are clearly elites within the sexual marketplace of the circuit.

This chapter examines the role of language in the circuit party sexual marketplace, focusing on the language ideology promoted in *Circuit Noize* magazine, the "bible of the Circuit" (Signorile 1998: 76). As the most influential magazine devoted to circuit subculture, *Circuit Noize* publishes a wide range of articles relating to circuit subculture in addition to providing listings and advertisements for various circuit events. The magazine actively promotes and attempts to define circuit boy identity, both through articles, in-group jokes, and quizzes testing specific knowledge of circuit culture. The circuit boy identity presented in the magazine reflects the stereotypes associated with the elite members of the circuit sexual market. The idealized circuit boy elites are defined through specific social practices, including recreational drug use, bodybuilding, and dancing. *Circuit Noize* promotes particular attitudes towards these social practices as well as forms of self-presentation, including language use. After discussing the history of circuit subcultures and controversies surrounding circuit parties, this chapter examines the circuit boy identity promoted in *Circuit Noize* magazine. The language ideology in *Circuit Noize* is then discussed, focusing on two columns from the magazine. The first column, "Circuit Talk," encouraged circuit boys to participate in the development of in-group slang terms associated with circuit culture. The second, "The Ears Have It," lists examples of interactions supposedly overheard at circuit parties that reflect the symbolic

value of camp interactional style in displays of wit and ritual insults that serve to index the circuit boy identity as a specifically gay form of masculinity. Awareness of in-group slang and interactional styles provides a means for men to performatively assert an identity as a "core" member of the circuit elite. Language provides one means of raising one's value within the circuit sexual market by indexing an identity that is actively promoted as sexually desirable. As circuit boy identity primarily involves signs that index masculinity, the use of camp language creates an indexical disjuncture. This disjuncture marks a site of difference between circuit boy masculinity and hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. The use of camp is a form of lingusitic differentiation (Gal and Irvine 2000) which allows circuit boys to maintain a masculine identity while marking themselves as different from heterosexual men through the use of camp language ideologically associated with gay men.

2.0   Circuits

2.1   The history of circuits in gay culture

As gay neighborhoods began to emerge in urban centers in the twentieth century, specific locations became part of spatial and social networks that gay men referred to as the *circuit*. Chauncey (1994) traces the emergence of gay circuits to the early twentieth century involving a network of bars, parks, cafeterias, and theaters. Gay men would move between these different locations on the circuit seeking social or sexual interactions. In 1970s the circuit became the geographic center of clone social life. Levine (1998: 49-54) describes the circuit as involving bars, restaurants, gyms, and discos as well as locations for cruising (such as parks or streets) and sites for sexual interactions (such as bath houses or sex clubs). Clone sociality typically involved friendship circles, or cliques

(Levine 1998: 43-49) that served as a form of gay kinship. Indeed, kinship terms (sister, gay mother, etc.) were commonly used to refer to relationships between clique members. Sexual interactions between clique members were forbidden and sexual partners were typically chosen on the basis of approval from other members of one's clique. Cliques of "circuit queens" (Levine 1998) had regular weekend social schedules that involved visiting specific points on the circuit (usually in a specific order). Long-term committed relationships were also discouraged because they threatened clique stability because men in relationships typically stopped participating in the circuit. In addition to the traditional urban circuits around bars, clone cliques in New York also typically participated in annual parties held on Fire Island, a gay resort on Long Island. As clone culture took hold in cities with large gay neighborhoods in the 1970s, annual parties aimed at gay men began to be held in smaller cities (Levine 1998). Early parties of this type include the Emma Jones party in Pensacola, Florida (held from 1966 to 1974) and Southern Decadence held in New Orleans (beginning in 1971) (Weems 2008: 119). In 1976, two parties were founded that are often considered the beginnings of the current circuit phenomenon: Hotlanta (held in Atlanta, Georgia) and the Red Party (held in Columbus, Ohio) (Weems 2008:119).

In the 1980s, the AIDS crisis disrupted the circuit tradition in gay neighborhoods. Numerous charitable organizations that supported AIDS research and care emerged in response to the lack of government response to the crisis. AIDS organizations began holding large dance parties to raise money for their efforts. For example, in 1983, the Gay Men's Health Crisis began holding the Morning Party on Fire Island. As more and more charities began holding fundraising parties, the tradition of the circuit re-emerged to refer

to the series of parties held in different cities, rather than bars and bathhouses within a single gay neighborhood. New cliques of gay friends emerged who participated in the new circuit by regularly travelling together to specific parties throughout the year. In North America, the number of parties grew throughout the 1980s and 1990s with parties in a wide range of cities supporting both national and local AIDS charities. By the end of twentieth century, there were circuit parties every weekend of the year in cities around the world, from Birmingham, Alabama to Phuket, Thailand (Weems 2008:124ff).

Figure 5.1: Muscle Beach Party (White Party Week), Miami, Florida 2008 (Circuit Noize Interactive)

In 1996, a man attending the Morning After Party died from an overdose of GHB (gamma hydroxybutyric acid). Because the party raised money for the Gay Men's Health Crisis, the circuit became the center of controversy among gay journalists. Critics like Gabriel Rotello (1998), Andrew Sullivan (1999), and Michelangelo Signorile (1997) argued that the circuit was a destructive force that endangered partygoers (see Robinson

2005 for a detailed discussion of the circuit debates). The primary criticism of the circuit was that the widespread use of drugs endangered partygoers not only through the possibility of overdose, but also through unsafe sexual practices resulting from unclear thinking under the influence of various club drugs. Unashamed drug use and anonymous sex was argued to be highly hypocritical at events held to raise money for AIDS charities. Signorile (1997) called "the evangelical church of the circuit" a "cult of masculinity" that creates anxieties and insecurities that are detrimental to the lives of gay men. For these critics, the circuit's emphasis on drug-use, promiscuous sex and an unachievable physical ideal posed a threat to the mental health of circuit party attendees.[1]

In contrast, Erick Rofes (1998) argued that these critics were simply using circuit boys as scapegoats for problems that existed throughout gay communities. Rofes argued that critics of the circuit were unwilling to confront the complexity of unsafe sex and drug abuse among gay men and found it easier to blame the circuit in order to offer a simplistic explanation with an obvious group to blame. Rofes also argued that the absence of shame by younger gay men who were unashamed about their desires for sex and drugs, particularly in the face of an epidemic, created anger in the older gay critics:

> Men who attend circuit parties have been granted the dubious distinction of serving as scapegoats for the current sex panic emerging within gay communities. In retrospect, this might have been predicted. Commonly seen as young, white, muscular, affluent, and hedonistic, they are excised from the daily fabric of their lives and fixed permanently in one of three sites: the circuit event, the gym, or the sex club. They become men without jobs, families, meaningful friendships, or cultural or political concerns. They inhabit the streets of the gay ghetto, flaunting their bodies, giving off attitude, and making other gay men feel inadequate. (Rofes 1998: 189)

While Signorile and Rotello find enjoyment of the circuit as resulting from abjection and low self-esteem, Rofes and Nimmons (2002) view the circuit as a form of catharsis to deal with the trauma of the AIDS epidemic. As Nimmons argues:

> There is no more central aspect of queer men's dance culture than its role as communal catharsis…They are places to try on the most deeply-held dreams: a feeling of freedom in a homosocial environment, easy availability of sex, ecstasies of substances and of movement, safety in public, being proudly "out," late nights and great music beautiful men, the chance to live in a different skin away from home. It is an oasis moment of social support, sexual adventure, excitement, and affirmation, a cherished chance to live out fantasies involving a sought-for gay male tribalism. (Nimmons 2002: 161)

The views of Nimmons and Rofes reflect the primitivism inherent in much of the writing in *Circuit Noize* magazine. Articles in the magazine regularly described circuit parties in terms of spirituality and "tribal" sexuality.

2.2   *Circuit Noize* **and circuit culture**

Circuit Noize was first published by Steve Kammon in 1993 as a flyer promoting various circuit parties. The magazine was published quarterly and was distributed free of charge at circuit parties (in addition to being available through subscription). Beginning with the first issue of 2007 (the fifty-first issue of the magazine), the "circuit" was dropped from the title and the magazine became *NoiZe*.[2] Although still covering circuit events, the magazine broadened to include articles about gay bars and dance clubs more generally, rather than focusing exclusively on circuit parties. The name change reflected a decline in the popularity of circuit parties that the editors associated with the rise of the internet as a source for potential sexual partners. The shift also coincided with the emergence of gay neighborhoods in which the cultural norms of circuit parties became local neighborhood norms. In New York City, for example, the neighborhood of Chelsea

became associated with many circuit cultural practices (such as bodybuilding, dancing, and the use of club drugs). Although the cultural assumptions and ideology of the magazine remained the same, the focus was no longer specifically tied to the circuit. *Circuit Noize* also runs a website that includes listings of circuit parties, an on-line version of the magazine and links to webpages and social networking sites related to the circuit.

In discussing the shift in the magazine's name, (Taylor and Taylor "Flipping the circuit breaker" 2007 CN 51: 10-12)

> In the fifty issues prior to this one, Circuit Noize chronicled the lifestyle of the Circuit. Profiles of the hottest established DJ talent as well as up-and-coming stars, articles on the highs and lows of recreational substances, spotlights of the many benefit parties that created this phenomenon and the people who produced them, and of course – the calendar. An exhaustive guide to the who, what, and where of everything that we know and love as the Circuit. (Taylor and Taylor 2007:10)

The limited scope of *Circuit Noize* meant that the magazine's primary objective was that of marketing the circuit parties that provided the overwhelming majority of its advertising revenue. While there are advertisements for other products associated with the circuit (such as clothes or music), the majority of the magazine contains full-page advertisements for specific circuit events. Rather than simply promote parties, however, *Circuit Noize* marketed the circuit as part of a lifestyle associated with a culturally distinctive identity. Representations of collectivity in *Circuit Noize* often refer to circuit boys as a *tribe*. Indeed, one article compares circuit culture directly to a dictionary definition of "tribe" in order to demonstrate the degree to which circuit boys form a *tribe* rather than a community or a nation (Kleine 2004). One type of dance music played at circuit parties is known as *tribal music* and "tribal" tattoos (based on traditional

Polynesian or Native American designs) are common among circuit boys. In addition to

evocations of tribalism, the circuit is presented as having a unique history and unique

forms of cultural production. Although circuit parties are a relatively recent phenomenon,

Circuit Noize emphasizes their relationship to other historical trends among gay men,

including the molly houses of eighteenth century England, drag balls in Harlem, Mardi

Gras parties in New Orleans, and clone disco culture in the 1970s (Weems 2008a,

2008b). In terms of cultural production, the primary focus in circuit culture is music.

Reviews of dance records and discussions of specific DJ performances are regular

features of the magazine. There are also occasional articles related to circuit art and

examples of poetry related to the circuit.

As a sexual marketplace, circuit parties are an extremely competitive environment

with a strong focus on body image. The weekly schedule of the stereotyped circuit boy is

to train at the gym Monday through Friday, while attending circuit parties on the

weekends. In his examination of the role of bodybuilding among gay men, Alvarez

(2008) argues that the circuit basically boils down to a physique competition:

> The circuit boy trains like the athlete or the model because like an athletic
> contest or an audition for male models, the circuit party becomes a sort of
> competition, an unofficial beauty pageant. While other subcultures such as
> the leather and bear communities have formal and large-scale organized
> competitions (and many smaller ones) every year to elect the hottest
> leather man (International Mr. Leather) or the hottest bear (International
> Mr. Bear), the circuit party does not have an official competition –
> because the competition is built into the party. The circuit party is the
> contest; it is the fashion show; it is the unofficial Mr. Circuit Boy
> Competition. Simply put, it is the competition that drives circuit boys to
> take up the training schedules of athletes and underwear models. (Alvarez
> 2008: 191)

Competition among circuit boys extends beyond physique, however, and includes

knowledge of dance music and dancing skill, experience with and access to drugs, and

linguistic skill in camp interactions. The circuit elite are typically imagined as white and wealthy because of the high cost of travelling to parties regularly (e.g. Signorile 1997). Through the various forms of competition at circuit parties, however, it is possible for working-class men to enter into the circuit elite. Thus, Weems argues that elite status is independent of socio-economic status:

> Elitist Circuit identity is independent of one's economic status. Although Circuiteers in general might have a higher income than the average person, not all participants are so privileged. I have seen Circuit boys who live from paycheck to paycheck while maintaining an elitist identity. (Weems 57)

The circuit elites epitomize the core values and cultural practices associated with circuit boy identity. *Circuit Noize* reinforces the competitive nature of circuit party culture both by foregrounding the circuit elite in the magazine and by attempting to provide information that could serve useful to those trying to enter into the elite. The magazine regularly includes features involving the circuit stereotype like *"You know you're a circuit boy when..."* and quizzes that "test" how close an individual comes to the stereotype of circuit boy identity. Every issue includes pictures from circuit parties that almost invariable show muscled elites without their shirts. Articles in *Circuit Noize* typically recognize the highly stratified nature of circuit culture. An article on how to pick up men at a circuit party, for example, warns against setting sights too high and wasting time trying to pick up someone who is out of the reader's league, saying "don't waste times aiming for gods who are busy searching for other gods" (Schroeder 2001).

In marketing itself as the primary source for insider information that can help individuals in their attempts to enter into the class of circuit elites, *Circuit Noize* does not challenge critics of circuit identity. Instead, *Circuit Noize* actively promotes the

stereotyped view of circuit identity and positions that identity as belonging to a class of elites within the circuit sexual marketplace. The magazine thus provides the citational background needed to performatively assert an identity as a circuit elite in various contexts, positioning the magazine as a potential tool for raising one's value in the circuit party sexual marketplace.

Figure 5.2: White Party (Miami Florida) 2008 (Circuit Noize Interactive)

2.3 Primitivity and circuit spirituality

In following the "tribal" view of circuit culture, circuit experiences with dancing, drugs and sex are often associated with spirituality (Lewis and Ross 1994, Rofes 1998, Nimmons 2002, Gorrell 2005) in which drugs, music, and sex are the essential elements

of the circuit party ritual. Gorrell discusses the ways in which the gay-centered social space of circuit parties relates to the spiritual experiences of marginalized groups:

> As they strip off shirts and gather closer to others, physically touching strangers and friends, the margins of their world are dramatically adjusted. Circuit queens have done what many marginalized people do with their religious rituals. They gather together to experience a different world. Often, oppressed groups do this by focusing on the saving God who can provide an exodus out of their bondage. Here, these men leave the world that hates gays by focusing on the very thing they are hated for: their sexuality. (Gorrell 2005: 318-19)

The role of spirituality in circuit culture is typically associated with the imagined view of the circuit culture as a form of tribal primitivism. The combination of music, sex, and drugs is often associated with stereotypes of rituals in "primitive" cultures, as in the following from a *Circuit Noize* article on spirituality:

> The idea that music, dancing, sexuality, and altered states could involve spirituality is not without precedent in other cultures both past and present. In fact, most pre-Judeo-Christian religious events often included music, dance, and sexuality. Circuit parties evoke comparisons with traditional Native American powwows: Ritualistic, tribal gatherings involving music, dancing, commerce and the use of psychoactive plants (Hart 1997: 31, 34).

Here, the essential elements of the circuit party are associated with a stereotyped view of Native American rituals. As with the radical faeries (discussed in Chapter Three), appropriations from Native American cultures are used to index a distinct form of (primarily white) gay male spirituality. However, circuit spirituality is not associated with androgyny, nature, or rurality as it is among radical faeries.

Despite the view of circuit culture as "primitive", the primary elements of circuit style and practice are thoroughly "modern." Circuit discourse of (imagined) indigenous spirituality does not involve the appropriation of elements of indigenous culture or expressions of commitment to environmentalism. Regularly flying to parties where one

dances to synthesized music while taking manufactured drugs is somewhat difficult to reconcile with stereotypes of "primitive" behavior. Rather, circuit discourses of tribalism exploit the chronotope of primitivism as a form of self-exoticization built upon colonial tropes of tourism involving "espace" from modern society (see Stasch 2011).

3.0   Circuit boys

In terms of personal style, self-presentation among circuit boys typically involves elements that index participation in typical circuit practices. The stereotypical "uniform" for circuit parties is low-rise jeans, track pants, or tight cotton shorts, typically worn without a shirt. If a shirt is worn, it is usually a tank-top undershirt or a very tight T-shirt. Circuit clothing draws attention to upper-body physique, indexing an individual's commitment to body-building and his position as a commodity in the circuit sexual market. Outside of the party context clothing styles are more varied, although they almost always involve tight pants or shorts with tight shirts. Although some well-known designers are popular among circuit boys, the clothing at circuit weekend typically comes from smaller companies that cater specifically to a gay male market and are sold at boutiques in gay neighborhoods. The preferred footwear is running shoes because of their utility in marathon dance sessions. During the day, hiking boots or strap-on sandals are also common. The stereotypical circuit boy is clean shaven with short hair. Body hair is completely shaven except for three small patches of carefully trimmed pubic and underarm hair. The removal of chest and leg hair highlights muscle definition, while removing the majority of pubic hair makes genitals appear to be larger. Accessories such as bracelets and necklaces are common and are not particularly ornate, reflecting jewelry typically marketed to men. Designer sunglasses may be worn at any time of day or night,

although they are often worn on the head rather than actually over one's eyes. At parties, accessories that emit light are particularly popular. The website www.clubthing.com offers a wide range of accessories for circuit parties, including necklaces, bracelets, sunglasses, belt-buckles, armbands, feather wings, and hats. Most of the products either glow in the dark or include LEDs in order to draw attention in the dark environment of the dance floor. At dances, stereotypical circuit boys carry bottled water at all times, often holding a bottle in their back pocket. Because drugs like GHB and ketamine may be added to water, setting down one's bottle even for a moment could result in an unintentional bottle exchange in which one loses their drugs for the evening.

Figure 5.3: Circuit party attendee (Circuit Noize Interactive)

Dressing in the stereotypical circuit boy style is one way of indexing commitment to circuit subculture and an association with the circuit elite. Although personal style may index a desire to be considered part of the elite, one cannot enter into the class of circuit elites through dress alone. Performative assertions of elite identity combined with a lack of control in drug use or an unperfected physique are not likely to succeed.

In terms of cultural practice, circuit subculture is perhaps closest to the clone culture of the 1970s than any other contemporary gay male subculture. Levin (1998) suggests that clone culture revolved around "the four D's": dancing, drugs, dick (or sex) and dish (or gossiping). Circuit boy identity, particularly as promoted by *Circuit Noize* magazine, revolves around the same four principal cultural practices. The following sections outlines the ideologies associated with each (as presented in *Circuit Noize*). This section discusses the first three (dance, drugs and dick). Details about circuit boy language are discussed in section four.

3.1　Dance

The main event of any circuit party weekend is the dance, typically held on the Saturday night of the party weekend. Although sexual encounters and independent parties may occur during the party weekend, the dance is the centerpiece of the experience. In addition to the throng of men dancing, the dance floors at circuit parties often have raised platforms that are usually used by "flag dancers" who stand above the crowd twirling flags similar to those used with marching bands. Because the music sets the tone for the main party, the choice of DJ is extremely important for party organizers. DJs known throughout the circuit community may help draw in additional travelers.

In addition to information about DJs and music reviews, *Circuit Noize* regularly includes articles about how to improve the experience of dancing. This does not mean presenting dance moves or introducing dancing styles, as circuit dancing is free form and does not involve a predetermined set of movements. Indeed, attempting to remember and repeat specific dance steps while high on club drugs could easily lead to tragedy. Rather than discussing how to actually dance, articles in *Circuit Noize* focus on the spiritual and social aspects of the dance experience. There are articles on how to increase the spiritual experience by "harnessing energy" or "getting in tune" with the crowd. One article (Taylor 2008) suggests performing yoga positions on the dance floor to reduce fatigue and enhance spirituality. Articles celebrating the spirituality of the dance experience are also common, like Josh Adler's "A dance floor meditation," which simply describes the dance experience from the spiritual perspective:

> There on the dance floor, in the midst of thousands of sweaty dancers, I found that I am coming closer and closer to understanding what it feels like to make love with the great spirit creator, the fountain of life, the beautiful mystery. Here on the dance floor, I worship. Here on the dance floor, I give thanks. (Adler 2003)

Although individual dancers may be attempting to "make love with the great spirit creator," the presence of so many men dancing in one space may also raise problems in terms of social interaction. Articles on proper dance floor etiquette are also a common feature of the magazine. An article named "Dance floor don'ts" by Dennis Flemming (2004) lists actions that one should avoid on the dance floor. Flemming describes the dance floor as a "sacred space" where inappropriate behavior may dampen the spiritual experience of others. The list of don'ts includes the following:

> No open containers. No smoking. No whining. No unrestrained locks [of hair]. No incessant talking. No funk [body order]. No over zealous (sic) or under composed [over drugged]. No flailing accoutrements (flags, etc). No unwelcome amorous gestures. (Flemming 2004: 74-5)

For individuals who are not circuit party regulars, such articles explain the normative behavior for those men wishing to join the nucleus of elites on the dance floor. Behavior that might be considered undesirable but common in a gay bar (such as holding a drink on the dance floor, groping a stranger, or having long hair) are considered *tragic* in the context of a circuit party. This is particularly important on the dance floor, where the circuit elite are exposed to public scrutiny.

3.2   Drugs

The primary justification for the use of club drugs at circuit parties is that they serve to enhance the dancing experience. The primary drugs associated with circuit parties are MDMA (or ecstasy), GHB, ketamine (or "K"), and crystal methamphetamine. The last three are particularly central in circuit subculture and form the trio of "girls" in circuit drug slang: Gabby, Katy, and Chrissy. Although the drugs may also be used to enhance sexual interactions, such as taking crystal methamphetamine in order to have marathon sex sessions, drugs are much more critical for the experience of dancing. Very little (or no) alcohol is consumed at circuit parties, because the alcohol lessens the sensations caused by club drugs. Instead, circuit boys typically drink bottled water to avoid dehydration on the dance floor and to ingest GHB, a clear liquid that can be poured into a bottle of water. Overdoses are common occurrences at circuit parties and an awareness of the proper ways to combine club drugs is a basic part of being *fierce* and belonging to the circuit elite. As Weems (2008) argues, knowledge about how to take (and acquire) specific drugs is an important part of belonging to the circuit elite.

> If anything, the attitude towards club drugs in the Circuit community fosters an elitist identity based on shared outlaw status and substance-savvy sophistication. (Weems 57)

Because of the importance of drugs in the circuit experience, the most extensive research on circuit boy culture has come from studies in medicine that focus on the specific types of drugs used at circuit parties and, to a lesser extent, the implications of drug use for practicing safe sex. Articles discussing drug use are common in *Circuit Noize*. Although these articles sometimes about recognizing addiction or avoiding drugs, they more often present the sort of information about drugs that are important for elite identity. This includes information on the effects of drug combinations, ways to treat overdose, or suggestions for how to behave when stopped by law enforcement. Thus, advice on drugs is more likely to involve information on how to carry and take drugs ("Buy a Chapstick and melt the wax out with hot water. Clean it thoroughly and you have the perfect, watertight, camouflaged pill container") or how to avoid *tragic* mistakes in drug combination ("Keep the Viagra separate from any other pills in your pocket. Unneeded dance floor erections can be troublesome") (*Tricks of the trade* 1999).

3.3 Dick

Although the dance is the central component of circuit party weekends, there is no doubt that many men attend circuit parties specifically because of the sexual marketplace created by the presence of such large numbers of gay men celebrating and vacationing together. Within circuit subculture, sex is a basic part of sociality and most events during a circuit weekend are saturated with sexuality. As Alvarez (2008) notes:

> Sex is a huge part of the circuit party appeal. Like most good gossip, much of the hype surrounding circuit parties really boils down to sex. If we take a closer look at the type of fun that goes on at the weekend-long parties we would come up with an interesting list: half-naked boys dancing the night

> away, sex parties, orgies, nonmonogamy and overt celebration of the flesh
> – all behaviors, acts, and attitudes that violate the unwritten code of ethics
> of modern queer culture that basically aspires to mirror the failed model of
> heterosexual marriage. (Alvarez 2008: 196)

As within clone culture, monogamous relationships are generally discouraged in circuit subculture as they remove potential partners from the sexual market. As Alvarez notes, attitudes towards sexuality have lead to widespread criticism of the circuit both for this anti-monogamy stance and for widespread drug use that is seen as creating an environment where unsafe sex is common.

Although *Circuit Noize* regularly includes articles promoting safe sex, it reinforces this anti-monogamy ideology by normativizing casual and anonymous sexual interactions. There are articles on how to negotiate a non-monogamous relationship and how to pick up sexual partners. In two issues published in 2003, the magazine printed parodies of marriage announcements between gay male couples as published in newspaper social columns. The wedding announcement parodies do not include couples in committed relationships but rather describe weekend hook-ups between strangers and often make references to having sex with other men despite the marriage ceremony (e.g. "Attendants included an array of tricks from the previous two nights" (Flemming 2003).

Representations of the circuit as a sexual marketplace in *Circuit Noize* also reinforce the idea of the circuit as a unique cultural space with its own norms for sexual interaction. A 2001 article offering advice on how to pick up a man at a circuit party begins by emphasizing the circuit as culturally distinct:

> "Yes, but I already KNOW how to pick someone up at a Circuit party!"
> Sure you do. But you may not *really* know how you do it, or that there is a
> distinct pattern, a 'script' which must be followed in order to do it
> successfully. There are rules to this game, and they're quite different from
> picking up guys any other place. (Schroeder 2001)

In the highly competitive sexual market of the circuit, knowledge of how to interact with other men is presented as a crucial component for successfully finding sexual partners. As members of the circuit elite are the most valued commodities in the circuit sexual market and are highly sought after, entering the elite provides a competitive edge by opening up a larger range of potential sexual partners. Within the elites, nothing is emphasized more than physical appearance, particularly having a muscular physique. This emphasis is not on natural looks or being "handsome," but on attractiveness that can be achieved through exercise and body-building. In his study of gay gym culture, Alvarez (2008) holds that the competitive nature of circuit boy fitness regimes revolves around the desire for social and sexual relationships:

> Unlike the athlete or the model, the circuit boy does not compete for a medal or a photo shoot, but for something closer to the heart: potential mates, both platonic and romantic. (Alvarez 2008: 194)

Physical training is the most reliable means for finding friends, lovers or sexual partners belonging to the circuit elite and the use of steroids and nutritional supplements to increase muscle mass are quite common. Although some circuit boys were originally prescribed steroids in order to treat AIDS wasting syndrome, the use of steroids is another point of controversy among critics of circuit culture (e.g. Signorile 1997). In his ethnographic study of circuit parties, Weems (2008) describes the circuit ideology of the body as a form of "body fascism" that regulates both social and sexual interactions among circuit boys:

> Body fascism in the Circuit reached its peak with the MBHB (Miami Beach Hard Bodies), a group dedicated to having private orgies during Circuit party weekends that were restricted to only a select few. This series of carnal gatherings was held in hotel rooms and private residences. Certain men chosen for their physical beauty received invitations. There

was a bouncer-of-sorts at the door, screening potential hard bodies before they were allowed entry after paying a cover charge. (Weems 36-7)

Such sex parties involving the circuit elite are common occurrences, particularly following the main dance event. One motivation for taking crystal methamphetamine is to stay awake long enough to still have energy for sex after hours of non-stop dancing. Drugs intended to treat erectile dysfunction are also common at circuit parties, allowing men to maintain an erection throughout an extended orgy.

The rigid body ideology is reinforced in *Circuit Noize* both in imagery and in articles. Party photographs of shirtless muscled men appear in every issue and are posted on the magazine's website. The photographs fuel the physique competition, as being "hot" enough to appear in the magazine carries great symbolic value. *Circuit Noize* also publishes articles on physical training techniques. The advice in these articles emphasizes achieving the idealized circuit boy body. Examples include advice on taking steroids and nutritional supplements and on weight training (aerobic exercise is discouraged because it might reduce muscle mass).

4.0   Gendered language ideology in *Circuit Noize* magazine

Because of the important role of gym culture and body building in circuit subculture, circuit boys are often stereotyped as being obsessed with masculinity. In writing about the use of steroids among circuit boys, Signorile writes that the circuit "play[s] upon all our anxieties over masculinity, forcing many gay men to do *whatever* it takes to achieve the demanded musculature." (1998: 132) In their study of circuit subculture in Australia, Lewis and Ross (1995) describe circuit boys as striving to construct a "straighter-than-straight" gay identity (Lewis and Ross 1995: 178). Similarly,

in his ethnography of circuit boys, Weaver argues that the circuit revolves around

masculinity:

> There is…a concerted effort on the part of attendees to exercise and realize a particular experience of masculinity, one grounded in dress and gesture. While this exercise is carried out with more or less intensity, more or less success, and more or less commitment on the part of individual attendees, it would be difficult to argue that the realization of masculinity, through an approximation of "*a beefy tough macho thing,*" is not intimately connected to the circuit experience. (Weaver 2006: 626)

As Weaver suggests, a physical appearance that indexes strength and masculinity

is certainly central to circuit identity, but this outward image does not necessarily

correspond to normative masculinity in terms of language and demeanor. Although

circuit culture is often treated as a "cult of masculinity" (see Signorile 1997, Weaver

2005, 2006), the language ideology presented in *Circuit Noize* actually promotes forms of

language that are difficult to reconcile with heteronormative language ideologies of

masculinity. The muscled body of the circuit elite is often combined with stereotypical

forms gay male speech. In arguing against the idea of circuit boys as hypermasculine

symbols of gay male chauvinism, Erick Rofes writes:

> Yet many cicuiteers talk and move like queens. Once immersed in party culture, it becomes clear that a variety of masculinities are performed and negotiated within the circuit. Only a cursory glance allows for a superficial impression that circuit boys as a group conform to narrow hegemonic masculinity. How much easier it is to identify patriarchal abuses in men with muscles than to do so in queer academic circles or amid gay male journalists or drag queens! (Rofes 1998: 191)

Indeed, members of other subcultures such as bears or leathermen may deride "circuit

queens" as being overly effeminate. However, the juxtaposition of hypermasculine bodies

with stereotypically gay male behavior creates an indexical disjuncture typical of camp

styles. Within the language ideology promoted in *Circuit Noize* magazine, camp

interactional skill is highly valued, particularly the ability to produce a witty comeback that indexes normative circuit identity. The high value placed on camp, however, does not detract from the view that circuit boys are decidedly masculine.

Kiesling (2005) suggest four cultural discourses associated with "hegemonic masculinity" in North America:

> GENDER DIFFERENCE is a discourse that sees men and women as naturally and categorically different in biology and behavior. HETEROSEXIM is the definition of masculinity as heterosexual; to be masculine in this discourse is to desire women and not men sexually. DOMINANCE is the identification of masculinity with dominance or authority; to be a man is to be strong, authoritative, and in control, especially when compared to women, and also when compared to other men.
> MALE SOLIDARITY is a discourse that takes as given a bond among men; men are understood normatively to want (and need) to do things with groups of other men, excluding women. (Kiesling 2005: 696)

With the exception of heterosexism, the set of (sub)cultural discourses of circuit boy masculinity do not differ from the heterosexual discourses suggested by Kiesling. However, circuit discourses of masculinity are positioned not only in opposition to women, but also in opposition to heterosexual men and the discourses differ accordingly. In terms of male solidarity, for example, emphasis is on the desire and need to socialize with other gay men rather than with men in general. Indeed, the presence of women at a circuit weekend would not be nearly as great a threat to circuit solidarity as the presence of straight men. Within circuit discourse, dominance over women seems fairly irrelevant and other than those who sing dance music, women are largely erased from the content of *Circuit Noize*. However, dominance over other men is central to circuit boy masculinity. Given the extremely competitive nature of circuit culture, it is not surprising that dominance over other men is a constant theme in circuit boy discourse.

While dominance over other gay men (both in and out of the circuit) is inherent in the competitive circuit sociality, dominance over straight men is also a common theme. Indeed, allusions to "tribal primitivity" often suggest that gay men are more naturally and essentially masculine than their straight counterparts, for whom dominance is often associated with violence and aggression. The ideology of being "straighter than straight" (Lewis and Ross 1995) involves having a physical presence that demands respect and is intimidating enough to prevent any threat of violence from heterosexual men (i.e. "gay bashing"). For circuit boys, dominance is achieved through physical appearance and interactional skill, while the overt aggression and violence associated with heterosexual men is generally seen as an immature and undisciplined, a rather pathetic form of masculinity. References to straight men in *Circuit Noize* almost always either refer to the inherent inferiority of heterosexual men or suggest that heterosexual men are, in most cases, easily seduced into having gay sex (*heteroflexible* in circuit slang).

Similarly, although gender difference is assumed, sexual difference is also a regular component of circuit discourse. Gay men are not only different from women, they are also naturally different from straight men. A 2004 *Circuit Noize* article compared patterns of masculinity among straight men and circuit boys to different species of primates, comparing circuit boys to sexually adventurous and peaceful bonobos and straight men to aggressive and violent chimpanzees:

> Chimpanzee and bonobo behavior can be seen as different paradigms for human masculinity. My older brother, a straight man in the military, is a chimp. His everyday language is peppered with words of violence. He ignores or talks down to our sisters. Gays are perverts. Genital rubbing outside of the sanctity of marriage is unacceptable…The gay male Circuit 'bonobo' uses sexual behavior to make friends. 'Gay pride' is the foundation of a deeply spiritual connection with all of humankind. Women

> are fabulous. There is nothing that cannot be accessorized. Intoxicants enhance, not impede dancing skills. (Weems 2004)

The masculinity of circuit boys is primal and sexual but not violent or aggressive. These "bonobos" know the importance of accessorizing and recognize the fabulousness of women. Circuit boy masculinity is also more controlled than straight masculinity. While straight men drink alcohol, which impedes their dancing ability, circuit boys take club drugs that allow them to focus on the dancing experience. Within the gender ideology of the circuit, a "primitive" openness to expressions of sexuality is combined with emotional control and maturity that need not result to aggression or violence.

The difference between straight men and gay men in circuit ideology is certainly not a question of masculinity or femininity. Although gay men are seen as sharing certain traits with women (particularly traits associated with style, creativity, and preferences for leisure activities), the overlap is assumed to result not from gay men being effeminate, but rather from straight men being utterly inept. Because heterosexual men are understood as generally undisciplined, boorish, and incompetent, the social attributes that gay men share with women are signs of gay male superiority. The circuit boy glorification of womanhood is important in the ideology of gay male superiority over heterosexual men. It is not all women that circuit boys think are "fabulous." The type of femininity most appreciated in circuit culture is the bitchy diva femininity central to traditional forms of camp. Indeed, the circuit boy ideology of women could easily be read as more misogynistic than feminist. The appreciation of women is basically limited to women who act like drag queens, while actual drag queens are denigrated because they exemplify negatively-viewed stereotypes of gay men as effeminate. By restricting the circuit worship of women to only those traits that are seen as overlapping with gay men,

it becomes possible to glorify femininity without challenging male domination over women. The distinction between circuit gender ideology and hegemonic chauvinism, is that only gay men are superior to women, while heterosexual men are inferior to everybody else.

Circuit boy language ideology as presented in *Circuit Noize* reflects these cultural discourses of circuit masculinity. Throughout most of the 1990s, the magazine actively promoted in-group circuit boy slang that reinforced the discourses of sexual difference and male solidarity. In addition to promoting in-group slang, *Circuit Noize* has always included a regular column, "The Ears Have It" listing humorous interactions or comments overheard at circuit parties. The interactions listed in "The Ears Have It" give symbolic value to particular interactional norms associated with camp style (see Chapter One). In both columns, the editors invite contributions from readers to produce symbolic interactions that index an assumption of shared norms for language use. Prizes such as CDs were offered as rewards for good submissions, giving real (albeit minimal) value to particular uses of language.

4.1   The Circuit Glossary

In addition to normativizing stereotypical elements of the circuit as a sexual market, *Circuit Noize* promotes a shared understanding of circuit boy identity including norms for circuit boy behavior, including shared norms for using language to index participation in circuit culture. The magazine regularly introduced slang terms that would index circuit identity. Knowledge of in-group slang could potentially aid in entering the circuit elite by indexing one's commitment to a circuit-centered identity. The editors of *Circuit Noize* directly link the introduction of in-group slang with the discourse of

cultural distinctiveness, promising to provide "words for those unique situations that circuit boys often find themselves in, but are unable to put into words" (quoted in Barrett 1998: 43). Although the magazine attempted to introduce a number of slang terms, the only term that seemed to contain sustained widespread use was *K-hole*, which refers to a state of cognitive-physical dissociation produced by the drug ketamine (known as *K*). Achieving the feeling of detachment from one's physical body is "falling into a k-hole," the main goal of taking the drug. For some, reaching the state of a k-hole on the dance floor is a basic part of the circuit party ritual. In one article, *Circuit Noize* attempted to expand the use of prefixal "k" (as [kej] or [ka:]) to already common words like *k-hole* or *k-whore* (ketamine addict) by proposing a language game called *ka-lingoing* (Cory 2001). The article describes an evening of dancing on ketamine, using examples of ka-prefixing (which are defined in footnotes, included in the text below):

> I'm right where I want to be – ka-whacked! [The point of no return]. People around me now are talking to me (I think) or are they talking *about* me? I try to ask. I try to form a word. What's a word? I formulate what I think is a sentence. I hear, "Oh God, he's ka-talking [Talking in a k-hole and no one but your k-hole buddies has a clue what you're talking about and even they still say, "What?"] again." I'm right here…and there…I start to get a little worried. There is no longer a continuum of time. Am I here? Who are you? Am I looking fringed [Fringe – The people on the edge of the dance floor. You know, the people that make you go, "uhm" and "What were they thinking?"] (Cory 2001:98)

Although there is no evidence that ka-prefixing actually caught on as a form of circuit slang, proposing an in-group language game is typical of the ways in which *Circuit Noize* attempts to use language to foster cultural distinctiveness.

Until 1998, *Circuit Noize* ran a regular column called "The Circuit Glossary" promoting the use of in-group circuit slang (see Barrett 1998). Some examples are given below:

1) **Preheating** – the time from ingestion to buzz. As in "Where's Mark?" "Oh, he's not ready to dance yet, he's still preheating."

    Docking – The point at which two or more mutually attracted men nonverbally dance toward each other. As in "Where's Jack?" "Oh, he's docking with that boy from Miami."

    Schooled – when you get showed up on the dance floor by a straight guy…theoretical, because it never happens
    Bump break – the point at which the music slows down allowing you to take a bump. "During the bump-break my trick took two bumps fixed his hat, and lower his jeans."

    Juice break – when your steroid source gets busted a month before the hottest party of the season

    F.D.A (Food and Drug Administration) – Timing your last meal so that you can enjoy your "party favors" on an empty stomach.

    Flesh Train – This is the dance that you do with guys you know and guys you have no clue where they came from, and everyone is connected in one big "X" hug bobbing back and forth.

    Binary scale – "circuit doability" The ultimately succinct and superficial rating scale by which persons are assigned either a "1" or a "0" in terms of whether you'd do them or not. The preferred rating scale at circuit parties because of the lack of burdensome numbers.

These slang terms reinforce the cultural values and practices associated with the stereotyped circuit identity associated with members of the circuit elite. There are terms related to drug use (*preheating, F.D.A., bump break*), dancing (*flesh train, docking*), steroid use (*juice break*), sexual competition (*binary scale*) and assumed superiority to heterosexual men (*schooled*). The introduction of these terms assumes a rather direct relationship between language and culture in which the most superficial forms of language (lexical items) are directly tied to culturally-specific interactions and experiences.

In 1996 and 1997, *Circuit Noize* attempted to further foster the development of in-group circuit slang by developing an interactive program of language planning in which readers of the magazine were asked to suggest neologisms for cultural contexts felt to be unique to circuit culture. The magazine presented a set of situations and experiences and asked readers to contribute suggestions for a slang term to refer to the situation/experience. Readers could win prizes if their neologism was chosen by the magazine as the new slang term. Examples of these situations (and the terms proposed and those chosen by the magazine) are given below:

2) **Situation**: The period of time your boyfriend is missing, when he says he's going to the bathroom.
   Proposed terms: Escape time, MIE (missing in ecstasy)
   Chosen term: Tea break [NOTE: a reference to the slang term *tea room*, a public bathroom where men have sex]

   Situation: The moment at which you realize the hot stud who excused himself to go to the bar is not returning.
   Proposed terms: Dinger, Shot
   Chosen term: Hit and run

   Situation: The empty water bottle that gets tangled between your feet on the dance floor.
   Proposed terms: the Evian factor, dance floor rats, flotsam and jetsam, tap dancing, circuit soccer, ball ball
   Chosen term: bottle-locked

   Situation: The inability to remove the wrapper from a stick of gum.
   Proposed terms: gum dumb, gumbled, pocket fusion
   Chosen term: Katy fingers

   Situation: The point at which you realize that you've already had sex with the person you just had sex with.
   Proposed terms: double dipping, déjà screw, daze two/the daze after, dejatrade
   Chosen term: déjà blew

As with the other slang terms proposed by *Circuit Noize*, the situations proposed for neologisms also refer to cultural experiences that could be seen as unique to a circuit context while reinforcing the centrality of sex, dancing, and drugs in circuit culture.

In addition to referencing specific in-group culturally-specific behavioral norms among circuit boys, the slang terms in *Circuit Noize* also serve as a resource for the production of camp language. Harvey (2002) suggests that one of the basic camp citationality involves direct references to language itself. In earlier work, Harvey (2002) notes that one way of producing *ludicrism* (which he considers a subcategory of camp language) is through the use of puns, word-play and double-entendre. Many of the slang terms proposed in *Circuit Noize* involve these strategies for producing ludicrism. There are forms that serve as a potential source of double-entendre (*hit and run*, *preheating*, *binary scale*, *tea break*), puns (*déjà blew*, *the daze after*) and word play (*gumbled*, *gum dumb*). Like other forms of camp, these slang terms allow for indexical polysemy in which the dominant meaning of the word is contrasted with a local interpretation specific to circuit subculture. The use of Food & Drug Administration, for example, involves contrasting the dominant cultural meaning (the agency of the U.S. government) with the meaning specific to the circuit (timing the intake of food and drugs). The linguistic form of circuit slang terms are thus typical of a gay male camp style, reinforcing the gender ideology of the circuit that emphasis the cultural difference between gay and straight men. Circuit slang also revolves around social practices specific to the circuit (and not necessarily found in the larger gay community), allowing them to simultaneously indexes gay identity in general while specifically emphasizing circuit boy identity.

4.2   The Ears Have It

The *Circuit Noize* column "The Ears Have It" simply lists things reportedly overheard at circuit parties. The lists include "catty" camp comments, "comebacks," and insults conveyed through innuendo. As noted in previous chapters, camp forms of language revolve around the ability for a sign to have multiple indexical meanings associated with different cultural norms for interpreting indexical meanings. The examples of positively-valued interactions in "The Ears Have It" all involve references to social contexts specific to circuit subculture, particularly the three central areas of drugs, sex and dancing. Many of the examples involve insults that fit the traditional forms of "dish" described by Levine (1998), such as the speech event of "reading" discussed in chapter two. Like the forms of circuit slang, they combine traditional gay male forms of camp interaction with circuit-specific contexts. They also reinforce particular interactional stances (e.g. sarcasm, parody, ludicrism) that are central elements to camp style (see Harvey 2000). The value in being able to successfully index camp interactional styles emerges through the demonstration of wit and intelligence associated with camp. As one example from "The Ears Have It" states, "Tact is for those who aren't witty enough to be sarcastic." The examples in "The Ears Have It" also potentially serve as citations that can be repeated in order to index shared circuit boy experiences.

The camp element in these interactions indexes the understanding of femininity within circuit culture that emphasizes forms of femininity associated with camp. In discussion the ways in which camp citations index femininity, Harvey (2002) outlines two basic approaches to camp femininity:

> One the one hand, there are those [forms of citationality] that signal femininity as effusive and barely in control of the self and its expressivity.

These include devices of exclamation, hyperbole and vocative interpellations of the addressee. In contrast, there is a femininity that is off-hand, indirect and subtly bitchy. Far from being out of control, this femininity is viewed as calculating in its aims and in the means by which to achieve them. Here, the paradigmatic device is innuendo. (Harvey 2002: 1155)

The first form of femininity may be indexed through overly dramatic exaggeration, indexing a lack of control over one's emotions. This form of femininity typically involves the camp trope of treating everyday interactions as conscious performances. In the following example, exaggeration is used to overdramatize the state of exhaustion resulting from an evening of partying:

3) God, I am so tired. If I'm gonna have sex it'll have to be a 3-way. I need someone to hold my legs up.

Here, the suggestion that the third member of a sexual interaction might be needed simply to aid the exhausted partygoer hold up his legs uses camp exaggeration while reinforcing the circuit norm of obligatory sexual interactions immediately following the dance.

Such performances of an exaggerated self-consciousness are a common theme in "The Ears Have It," often involving self-consciousness references to physical appearance. The extreme attention to how one looks not only reflects the extreme importance of physical appearance within circuit subculture, but directly relates the emphasis on looks to the type of self-conscious performance associated with camp. The following examples use this trope of being extremely self-conscious about one's looks:

4) I need to go to the bathroom to see if I'm too fat to take my shirt off.

5) I love how I look after a good six-hour dick suck – it's like getting great collagen injection.

In the example 4, the speaker's fear of taking his shirt off indexes the way in which physical appearance restricts membership in the circuit elite. Although it is customary for circuit boys to take off their shirts on the dance floor, there is a general social norm in which one should only do so if their torso meets the high standards for muscularity. The phrase "Put your shirt back on" is a standard comment in such contexts, although it is almost never spoken directly to the offender directly (but rather is an aside comment directed to a third party). This comment also reflects the self-conscious performance associated with camp, as the speaker's concern reflects a fear that he is unprepared for an "on stage" appearance that will certainly make him vulnerable to scrutiny by other boys at the party. Example 5 also references the importance of looks and conscious self-presentation, but also references the hypersexual environment of the circuit. The value of this example seems to be in its ability to combine the circuit norm for prolonged sexual encounters ("a six-hour dick suck") with the normative obsession with physical appearance.

The camp trope of exaggerated performance is also indexed in the following example, which directly references the dramatic performance of everyday interactions:

6) A: Where's my sunglasses?"

   B: On top of your head.

   A: Oh, thank God! That was so much less drama than I thought it was
         going to be.

Here, the speaker expresses relief in avoiding the "drama" associated with a rather ordinary event like misplacing one's sunglasses. The response to being told that his sunglasses are actually on his head is not one of embarrassment over the (presumably drug-induced) failure to realize that he is actually wearing the glasses he thinks he has

misplaced, but rather relief over not having to create a dramatic scene that centers around searching for the missing sunglasses.

Many of the examples in "The Ears Have It" involve indexical disjunctures between competing pragmatic strategies. Harvey (2002) notes that camp citations of femininity are often founded upon the juxtaposition of opposing interactional conventions, such as using indirection (typically associated with addressing the positive face needs of an addressee) and insult:

> The mechanisms of the innuendo as a deprecatory, addressee-oriented comment made through indirect means…it is not merely the feminine that is being cited, but also the pragmatic conventions themselves of interactional behavior. (Harvey 2002: 1155)

The use of indirection and innuendo are often stereotypically associated with femininity (e.g. Tannen 1993), because they presumably index a desire to avoid being confrontational. However, camp indirection is typically used to produce utterances that are clearly intended as insults, as in the following example from "The Ears Have It":

7) A: Wow, my chest and arms are looking really good.

   B: Yeah, too bad cummerbunds aren't in fashion.

Here, the initial agreement with the first speaker's claim to having good chest and arm muscles is undermined by the comment about cummerbunds, which indirectly suggests that the first speaker has a fat stomach despite having a nice chest. Although the structure of the exchange is that of a typical adjacency pair in which the first speaker seeks confirmation, the second speaker turns the confirmatory response into an insult. Rather than using indirection to avoid conflict, the indirection here actual aims to produce confrontation.

The use of indirect insults is a common trope in "The Ears Have It," as in the example "Don't they have leg machines at your gym?" which implies that the addressee has skinny legs. Often, the insults are framed within language that indexes a cooperative or supportive interactional stance. In the following example, the speaker displays concern over the addressee's sex life to indirectly insult the addressee's personal behavior:

8) A: You need to get laid.

   B: Can you really tell that just from my face?

   A: No, it's your personality.

Although "you need to get laid" suggests support or concern, the intended message (that the addressee is acting like a jerk) is actually confrontational. The following example uses the same type of indexical disjuncture in which a show of concern produces an indirect insult:

9) It might be a little more discrete if you took the glow stick out of your hand when you're doing a bump.

Here, the highly mitigated suggestion ("it might be a little more discrete") is used to reprimand behavior that perhaps merits a stronger admonition. The act of "doing a bump" (snorting crystal methamphetamine) while holding a light to one's face is a serious violation of circuit norms for discretion in drug use and the maintenance of an external appearance of self-control when taking club drugs. The suggestion here is that the addressee is over-drugged and has lost his ability to maintain his demeanor on the dance floor. The form of a highly mitigated "suggestion" is used to draw attention to highly non-normative behavior.

Camp indirection does not simply convey an attempt at "feminine" behavior by avoiding conflict or confrontation, but rather the ability to undermine the conventional

relationship between the forms of indirection and the interactional contexts that indirection may index. Indirection is commonly used to produce the sort of ritual insults common in gay male culture (see Goodwin 1989, Harvey 1998, Murray 1978).

Harvey suggests that the camp insults (or put-downs) create an "ambivalent solidarity" (Harvey 1998: 301-3):

> Ambivalent solidarity is a feature of camp interaction in which speaker and addressee paradoxically bond through the mechanism of the fact-threat. Specifically, the speaker threatens the addressee's face in the very area of their shared subcultural difference (here, queer subcultural identity and practice). Consequently, the face-threat, while effectively targeting the addressee, equally highlights the speaker's vulnerability to the same threat. This reciprocity of vulnerability explains how such threats are often cooperatively set up and managed, developing into a rhetorical routine. (Harvey 2000:254)

There are certainly insults in "The Ears Have It" in which the speaker is equally open to the face-threat posed by the insult. In the following example, the insult refers to practicing anilingus in anonymous sexual interactions:

10) A: Do you think that bread is OK? There was a fly on it.

B: Honey, you lick strangers' assholes. I'm sure it's fine.

Given circuit norms for sexual behavior, the insult of "licking strangers' assholes" presumably applies to both speakers, so that the face-threat involved is reciprocal (and indeed applicable to the stereotyped circuit boy more generally).

The camp insults in *Circuit Noize* typically index a normative ideology of sexuality within circuit subculture. In the following example, a camp insult involves suggesting that the speaker only pretends to be a "versatile" (willing to be either a top or a bottom) when he is actually only a bottom:

11) A: I love being versatile.

B: Dear, just because you're sitting on it doesn't mean you're on top

The insult here indexes circuit ideologies of desire, in which a supposed surplus of bottoms is regularly problematized. Articles within *Circuit Noize* sometimes reference the belief that most circuit boys are "bottoms" and complaints about the dearth of "tops" are common. In particular, there is a common circuit stereotype of men who pretend to be versatile, but only want to bottom once sex is initiated. The insult casts the "versatile" man into this negatively-viewed category of faux versatiles, indexing a broader belief within circuit culture.

As Harvey notes, the use of camp insults is a traditional rhetorical routine within gay male culture. Within the language ideology of the circuit (and of camp more generally), insults are more highly valued when they violate normative expectations for the progression of interactions. An insult may be valued because it is unexpected or surprising within a given context, as in the following example:

12) A: There was a time when I would let anybody fuck me.

B: Yeah, I know. That's when we were dating.

Here, as in the earlier examples, the intended meaning (conveying the second speaker's bitterness with the first speaker over repeated infidelity during their relationship) is prefaced with a show of agreement. Because of the initial agreement, the resulting insult is unexpected.

In addition to the use of indirection and innuendo, other examples of speech in "The Ears Have It" represent various tropes associated with camp language. These include the juxtaposition of explicitness and covertness, the use of puns or wordplay, and

the inversion of normative values (see Harvey 2000: 243). The juxtaposition of explicitness and covertness is demonstrated in the following example:

13) A: Look at his ass! I can't believe you didn't eat it when you had the chance.

    B: Honey, when my fingers walked the trail, they found that it was rocky.

Here, the metaphoric language (*walked the trail*) evokes covertness, while the actual meaning (that he did not perform anilingus because the man's anus wasn't clean) is quite explicit.

Examples of wordplay include the following:

14) A: Ever since my boyfriend took up flag dancing, I feel so lonely at the parties.

    B: I guess we'll have to start calling you a 'flag hag.'

15) I don't feel so good. I think I have too much blood in my drugstream.

The first involves the pun "flag hag" (a pun on *fag hag*, a slang term meaning a heterosexual woman with numerous gay male friends). The second involves wordplay, with the inversion of *drug* and *blood* in the expected phrase "drugs in one's bloodstream."

There are also examples that challenge normative values, particularly in cases where heteronormative values contrast sharply with the values associated with the circuit elite. Examples like "Being a slut is all about time management" evoke the anti-monogamy ideology promoted within circuit culture. The following example plays on the circuit attitude towards drug use:

16) Before I was a drug addict I had lots of problems. Now I only have one. It's given me such focus!

The idea that being a drug addict might give one focus clearly contradicts prevailing societal evaluations of drug use. Similarly, the comments in "The Ears Have It" may index the high value placed on physical appearance among the circuit elite, as in the following example:

> 17) I worked out my chest so much the other day I thought my pec implants were going to pop out.

Here, the idea of working out excessively despite having chest implants plays off of the "body fascism" associated with the circuit elite.

The comments chosen for inclusion in "The Ears Have It" reflect the types of language that are highly valued with camp language ideology. As such, they reinforce the idea of sexual distinction (that gay men are culturally different from straight men) by celebrating and rewarding forms of language use that use camp to index a stereotypical gay male identity. Although camp is often associated with femininity, the forms of camp in *Circuit Noize* only index interactional stances typically associated with femininity in cases where the actual intent of the utterance undermines the expected function of a pragmatic trope (such as using innuendo to convey an insult). Thus, although the forms of language presented in "The Ears Have It" are clearly forms of camp, they do not directly challenge gender normativity or index femininity, but rather performatively assert gay male identity through the use of camp tropes.

5.0 Conclusion

The language ideology in *Circuit Noize* places a strong value on camp interactions and displays of skill in producing camp utterances. These forms of camp typically reinforce or promote specific ideologies within circuit subculture, particularly those regarding patterns drug use, norms for sexual behavior, an emphasis on physical

appearance and the importance of music, dance and spirituality in the construction of circuit identity. The use of camp and its ability to convey in-group knowledge serve as a means for individuals to performatively assert an identity associated with the circuit elite. Although entry into the circuit elite is unlikely to succeed through language use alone, the language ideology of *Circuit Noize* provides exemplars for indexing circuit elite identity through the use of a camp interactional style. By emphasizing forms of language stereotypically associated with gay men, the language columns in *Circuit Noize* reinforces the ideology of cultural distinctiveness between gay and straight men while minimize the challenge camp might pose for circuit masculinity.

The *Circuit Noize* stance towards stereotypes of circuit identity does little to counter the viewpoint of critics who pathologize circuit boy practices of drug use and anonymous sex. Although there are regular articles on safe sex and the dangers of drug overdose, the ideology of the magazine does not directly condemn drug use and certainly promotes non-monogamy. The stereotyped image of the circuit elite presented in *Circuit Noize* combines middle-class oriented desires for travel and leisure with masculinity founded in risk-taking and 'outlaw' behavior. The allure of the outlaw circuit boy is, of course, a marketing tool and the magazine's revenue is dependent on attendance at circuit parties. By promoting the circuit elite as an "in-crowd", the magazine attempts to attract potential party attendees with the possibility of entering into the class of social and sexual elites depicted in the magazine. The language of this elite class reproduces a camp interactional style that would be generally recognized among potential party attendees, linking circuit identity with gay identity. This opens the possibility that skill in gay male interactional styles might serve to endear an individual to the in-group circuit elite.

Although being *fierce* typically involves physical appearance and style in dress or dance, a potential circuit boy can also achieve *fierceness* through interactional skills.

The gender ideology of circuit subculture is typically portrayed as a "cult of masculinity" (Signorile 1998). However, the circuit style of extreme muscles and athletic wear is combined with a language ideology that places high value on camp forms that are stereotypically associated with effeminate gay men. It is often assumed that camp inherently involves male expressions of effeminacy (see Halberstam 1998). The circuit forms of camp, however, seem geared towards indexing a gay male identity that is, otherwise, decidedly masculine. The elevation of camp thus creates an indexical disjuncture between language and materiality. The outward image of body and dress is indexically associated with masculinity, while camp linguistic style is indexically linked to femininity. In privileging camp interactional style, the editors of *Circuit Noize* promote and expand this disjuncture as a semiotic resource for the construction of a distinctive circuit boy identity.

The symbolic value of camp is not the result of its ability to index femininity, but rather in the power of camp to index cultural distinction from heterosexual men. The camp forms in *Circuit Noize* serve as a form of linguistic differentiation (Gal and Irvine 2001), in which differences in language use become associated with cultural differences. Forms of circuit slang and innuendos involving local circuit cultural ideologies and practices serve to differentiate circuit boys from other gay men, while the use of camp style displays forms of wit that reflect the supposed superiority of circuit boys over heterosexual men. The linguistic differentiation between circuit boy masculinity and

heteronormative masculinity is central to the construction of circuit boy identity. In the tribal kingdom of the circuit bonobos, no one wants to be mistaken for a chimpanzee.

1. Signorile also criticized the circuit for patronizing businesses that supported political efforts against the gay civil rights movement and for promoting a physical ideal that he see as detrminental to gay men's self-esteem.

2. Because the data discussed here are all from the period before the magazine changed its name, I will continue to refer to the magazine as *Circuit Noize*.

CHAPTER SIX

Viral Loads: Barebacker Identity and Interactional Stances Toward Ideologies of Safe Sex

1.0   Two Tricks from Texas

In writing about the political and social issues surrounding HIV transmission, it has become common for journalists and academics to include public confessions of their own sexual experience (e.g. Sullivan 1999, Warner 1995, Signorile 1997, Halperin 2007, Dean 2008). Michelangelo Signorile (1997) uses his confession to argue that the emphasis on sex and body image in gay culture has a detrimental effect on the lives of individual gay men. Signorile writes that his negative appraisal of gay culture began by questioning his own actions after he consented to having unprotected anal sex with a Texan he met in a bar in Hawai'i. Signorile recounts the incident:

> One night in a Waikiki gay bar I met your classic gay hunk: tall and masculine, with a buzzed haircut, razor-sharp cheekbones, a body of granite, and a Texas drawl. I'll make you see God tonight, he promised, trying to coax me to go home with him. It didn't take much for me to realize I needed a religious experience; we went to his place. As usual, one thing quickly lead to another. But not as usual, he didn't put on a condom before we had anal sex, and I didn't demand he use one…(Signorile 1997, xxxi)

Signorile offers a variety of rationalizations that passed through his mind as he consented to anal sex without a condom (he must be negative or he would've used a condom, HIV isn't as prevalent in Hawai'i, etc). The failure to use a condom is interpreted as a personal, momentarily irrational, and unintentional act. It reflects a failure to respond to the *use a condom every time* mantra of public health campaigns to prevent HIV.

Ten years later, Tim Dean (2008) recounts his own experiences tricking with a (presumably different) Texan in San Francisco:

> A couple years ago after the Folsom Street Fair, an annual bacchanal in San Francisco that draws leatherfolk from around the world, I ended up at the South of Market loft of a beefy, transplanted Texan. Midway through the action, which had begun at Blow Buddies, a local club known (among other things) for assiduously promoting "safer sex," the Texan whispered, "I want you to breed me." His request that I ejaculate directly inside his rectum is one that I've encountered periodically during sex with strangers over the past few years, though the Texan was the first to put it to me in these particular terms. (Dean 2008: 80)

Both incidents follow a stereotypical "trick" sexual script in which gay men meet at a bar (Signorile) or sex club (Dean) and then go back to one of the men's home to have sex. Although both tricks end with the same result (unprotected anal intercourse), the interactions leading to unsafe sex are strikingly different. Signorile does not negotiate condom use with his partner and the question of safe sex is never discussed. In contrast, Dean's trick does raise the issue and initiates negotiation over condom use, but openly states that he desires unprotected sex. By asking Dean to "breed" him, the Texan indexes the identity category of *barebackers*, gay men who insist on unsafe sex in general and unprotected anal intercourse in particular. In barebacker slang, *breeding* refers specifically to unprotected anal sex in which the top ejaculates in the rectum of his partner (without "pulling out" in hopes of reducing the potential risk of HIV transmission).

The use of *breed* does more than simply index barebacker identity. The use of *breed* also indexes the Texan's stance within the on-going interaction; the phrase *I want you to breed me* positions the Texan as desiring the "bottom" role and the choice of *breed* as the verb involved makes it clear that he does not want to use a condom. In addition to orienting the speaker with resprect to his sexual partner, the use of *breed* also indexes specific stances towards discourses and material objects beyond the interaction at hand. It

conveys an oppositional stance with respect to public health discourses related to HIV-prevention. It also indexes a specific stance towards semen as well as a unique subcultural ideology of desire that places seminal fluid at the center of gay sex.

This chapter examines the ways in which indexical markers of stance serve in the construction of barebacker identity. Although the majority of research on stance has (rightfully) focused on the role of stance in on-going interactions, this chapter emphasizes the ways in which stance may orient a speaker towards broader social discourses and material objects. This chapter analyzes blogs written by men who identify as barebackers to demonstrate the ways in which the bloggers construct barebacker identity through particular types of stance (Goodwin 2007). The analysis suggests that barebackers use interactional stance in strategic ways in response to social discourses regarding public health. By indexing epistemic, affective, and cooperative stance, barebackers position themselves as moral actors without directly addressing the view of unsafe sex as immoral espoused in public health discourse. Similarly, the barebacker bloggers use instrumental stance to orient themselves towards the materiality of seminal fluid. By indexing an affective stance as desirous of semen itself, barebackers construct an identity ("cum slut") in which unsafe sexual practice become rationalized as resulting from an essentialized desire for semen.

This chapter considers the social factors and public debates associated with the emergence of barebacker as an identity category. The primary sexual scripts and language that are associated with barebacker identity are presented through the analysis of barebacker pornography and barebacker sexblogs (websites in which individuals post narratives of their personal sexual experiences). Barebackers are often portrayed as

suffering from some psychological pathology (such as having a "death wish"). However, barebackers present their own experiences and decisions in rational and logical terms. The sexual scripts that have emerged among barebackers, particularly that of ritual semen exchange, serve to construct identities associated with specific participant roles in bareback sexual interactions. Attributes associated with these emergent categories (such as having an insatiable desire for seminal fluid) provide individuals with a normative and essentialized understanding of desire that are used to account for individual decisions and behaviors.

The chapter first provides background on the emergence of barebacker identity in the context of public debates about condom use and HIV prevention within the gay community. I then outline the various types of stance described by Goodwin (2007) and analyze examples of stance in barebacker blogs to demonstrate the ways in which barebackers orient themselves with respect to ideologies of safe sex. The chapter then discusses the role of stance in attitudes towards seminal fluid, includingthe construction of "cum slut" identity. The chapter concludes by discussing the ways in which barebacker uses of stance create indexical disjunctures that are central to the linguistic construction of barebacker identity.

2.0   Barebacker Identity

The distinction between barebacking as a sexual practice (as in the case of Signorile's trick) and barebacker as a social identity (as with Dean's trick) is primarily a question of intentionality. As "Bareback Jack" (who maintains a website for barebackers) writes:

> Straight people who fuck without rubbers are not referred to as
> "barebackers". And gay guys who act like stray cats in heat every now and

again, or who forego using condoms in situations where their judgment is impaired through alcohol, drugs, or pure lust aren't really barebackers. Why? Because they have made no *conscious and pre-determined* exception towards safe sex. (Bareback Jack 2003a)

Although media representations tend to assume a monolithic bareback "community," individuals who identify as barebackers differ widely in terms of sexual practice. Some barebackers are monogamous HIV-positive couples on HAART (Highly Active Anti-Retroviral Treatment, which can reduce HIV to undetectable levels) who have decided not to use condoms. Other barebackers may be HIV-negative men actively seeking HIV. Indeed, there are different interpretations of the term barebacking. The prevailing view seems to be that the term *barebacking* may to refer to any case of unprotected anal intercourse, while *barebacker* refers only to the identity category. Others assume that only barebackers can bareback and use the term *barebacking* only to refer to cases of unprotected anal sex in which the participants have made an intentional choice to not use a condom (Huebner et al. 2006).

The late Scott O'Hara is often represented as a pioneer of the bareback movement (see Race 2007). O'Hara was a porn star, writer, and publisher who argued for the moral and social acceptability of condomless sex between two men who are both HIV-positive. O'Hara openly criticized the gay porn industry for insisting that condoms be used in all of its films and was one of the first advocates for bareback pornography:

> You know what I want to see? What I really long for is some nice, down and dirty, raunchy porn between a couple (or a group!) of Positive guys who no longer feel paranoid about those wonderful "bodily fluids." I know why such videos haven't been made, and it *isn't* because Positives don't do it. It's because producers (and educators, and social workers, and a whole list of socially responsible people) are afraid that if Negatives see these videos, everything they've been taught about safer sex will go right out the window and they'll start a massive orgy that won't end util they all

> drop dead of exhaustion. Yeah, well, that's what *I'd* do if I'd been denying myself for the past decade and suddenly got "permission." (1999: 130)

O'Hara had **HIV+** tattooed on his neck so that his sexual partners had not doubt about his HIV-status. Although O'Hara did not use barebacker as an identity category, he has been credited with coining the word to refer to unprotected anal intercourse. (Bareback Jack 2003b). The posthumous publication of a collection of O'Hara's essays in 1999 helped spread his views on safe sex, just as the introduction of new HIV-medications seemed to bring the sort of "permission" O'Hara imagined.

The identity category of barebacker emerged soon after the introduction of HAART, a combination of medictions that usually controls HIV, preventing the onset of AIDS. Although HAART has severe side effects that can be extremely debilitating, it has allowed many HIV-positive men to maintain their health. As the number of men living with HIV increased, O'Hara's view of condomless sex spread and self-proclaimed *barebackers* emerged, aligning themselves with the concept of *serosorting*, the practice of restricting sexual interactions to partners who share the same HIV-status.

Barebacking, serosorting and HIV

Soon after the introduction of HAART, a "folk epidemiology" (Levine and Siegel 1992) of *serosorting* emerged in which men only have sex with men who share their HIV status (or *serostatus*) as a means of reducing transmission of the virus. Individuals practicing serosorting attempt to restrict themselves to *seroconcordant* sexual interactions (those involving men with the same serostatus).

Some gay men bareback because they are in long-term monogamous seroconcordant relationships and feel that the question of transmission is irrelevant. In a survey of gay men in Arizona, for example, being in a monogamous serocondcordant

relationship was the most frequently reported motivation for barebacking (Huebner et al. 2006: 74). The increased use of the internet for seeking sexual partners has played an important role in the growth of the serosorting movement. Studies suggest that, men are more likely to have unprotected sex with partners they find over the internet (Zlabotska 2009, Zlabotska et al. 2009). However, other studies show that men use the internet specifically to seek seroconcordant sexual partners (Elford 2006, Davis et al. 2006). Some researchers have suggested that serosorting has resulted in lower levels of HIV transmission. Truong et al. (2006) found that between 1998 and 2004, the rate on new HIV infections in San Francisco did not rise despite increases in both self-reported frequencies of unprotected sex and the frequency of cases sexually transmitted diseases other than HIV. Truong et al. conclude that this suggests that serosorting is succeeding as a preventative measure in San Francisco. However, many men who practice serosorting outside of monogamous relationships may not always know the actual serostatus of all of their sexual partners. In a study in the southeastern United States, Eaton et al. (2007) found that HIV-negative men who practice serosorting were in fact no more likely to know the actual HIV status of their partners than those who do not practice serosorting. HIV-negative men who participate in serosorting were thus putting themselves at higher risk for infection by having unprotected anal sex without actually knowing the serostatus of their partners. The problem of *seroguessing* (Halperin 2007) may lead to new HIV infections due to infrequent awareness of partners' serostatus (see Bulter and Smith 2008).

Although the rate of new diagnoses of HIV among men who have sex with men steadily declined in the 1990s, researchers at the Center for Disease Control found that

the rate of new cases of HIV began to rise again in the early 21st century, particularly among younger gay men (Hall et al. 2007). The decline in the 1990s is generally attributed to increases in safer sex practices and the introduction of HAART treatments. Because HAART reduces viral load (the amount of virus in a person's system), HIV-positive men taking HAART medications are less likely to transmit the virus to sexual partners (Blower et al. 2003). The more recent rise in the frequency of new HIV diagnoses would suggest that patterns of condom use are changing, raising the possibility that the emergence of the barebacker subculture may have lead to the increase in new HIV cases among younger gay men. Similarly, Zablotska et al. (2009) found an increase in unprotected anal intercourse with serodiscordant partners in Australia between 2003 and 2006. However, the ultimate impact of barebacking on HIV-transmission is unknown.

Transmission of HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases is not the only public health concern related to barebacking. HIV has a very high rate of replication, resulting in the emergence of mutated strains of the virus within the same individual (Richman 1993). The high rate of replication makes it difficult to develop an effective vaccine for HIV because the strains of the virus differ across individuals. In addition, the patterns of replication for HIV can result in the emergence of strains of the virus that are resistant to the drugs involved in HAART therapy (Richman 1993). This means that even in cases where HAART is an effective therapy for treating HIV, individuals can contract new strains of the virus that might be resistant to HAART therapy. If a drug-resistant strain has emerged within an individual, the virus could replicate quickly, raising an individual's viral load (the amount of virus in one's

system) and making it more likely that the drug-resistant strain will be transmitted to a sexual partner. Although some researchers have found that the majority of drug-resistant strains emerge from mutations within the body rather than from sexual contact with another individual (see Blower et al. 2001), the possibility of contracting a drug-resistant strain from unprotected sex is still a possibility for HIV-positive individuals. However, some barebackers assume that such a risk is minimal, particularly if both participants are taking HAART and have low viral loads.

The high replication rate of HIV also raises the possibility that mutations could eventually result in a 'supervirus' that is resistant to current forms of HIV treatment (Poudel et al. 2007). The fear of a supervirus is a major concern for public health officials, although the possibility of a supervirus developing is highly controversial (see Blower et al. 2001, Santora and Altman 2005, Smith 2005, Clark 2005, Laino 2005).

2.1   Representations of barebackers

Most cases of unsafe sex are not premeditated, but occur in the "heat of the moment" when individuals forgo condoms without serious contemplation, as in Signorile's (1997) confessional account above. For self-identified barebackers, however, the decision to not use condoms is usually carefully considered rational choice based on consideration of the potential risks. There are a number of factors that are perceived as ways of having "safer" sex without condom use. It is commonly thought that tops are at less risk than bottoms, that pulling out before ejaculation reduces the chance of transmission, that men with low viral loads are unlikely to pass on the virus, and so on. Despite the wide range of considerations that go into the

decision to abandon condoms, representations of barebackers in scientific and popular writing almost always represents barebackers as irrational and psychologically unstable individuals. In particular, popular representations have focused almost exclusively on a very small minority of barebackers who claim to intentionally attempt to contract or transmit HIV, known as *bugchasers* and *gift givers*.

For the majority of barebackers, choosing to have unprotected sex is based upon the concept of sersorting. However, a small minority of barebackers claim to actively attempt to contract or transmit HIV. This includes HIV-negative men seeking to *seroconvert* (to become HIV-positive), known as *bugchasers*, and HIV-positive men who intentionally transmit the virus to HIV-negative men, known as *gift givers*. Tewksberry (2003, 2006) found that only about 5 percent of all men who self-identify as barebackers also identify as bugchasers or gift givers. In an analysis of personal ads on a barebacking website, Tewkseberry (2003) found that less than 1% of uninfected men actively sought HIV-positive partners (and less than 2% of HIV-positive men specifically sought HIV-negative partners). However, the majority of men displayed no preference regarding the serostatus of their partner, suggesting that HIV-negative barebackers may be putting themselves at risk.

Although bugchasers and gift givers seem to be an extremely small subgroup among barebackers, representations of barebackers in both the media and scientific literature typically use bug chasers and gift givers to respresent the entirety of the bareback community. With the erasure (Gal and Irvine 2000) of the distinction between the majority of barebackers and bugchasers, all men who practice unprotected sex are described in a pathologizing discourse that seeks to explain the 'irrational' behavior of

barebackers. As Halperin (2007) notes, the language of pathology used in discussions of barebacking reiterate themes of homosexuality as a disorder that were prevalent in the pre-Stonewall era.

Such reports exploit the shock value of individuals intentionally seeking to contract or spread HIV. One of the most flagrant examples (see Halperin 2007) is a 2003 article in *Rolling Stone* called "In Search of Death" focused on "Carlos," a bug chaser who says that contracting HIV would be "the most erotic thing I can imagine" (Freeman 2003). On the prospect of becoming positive and turning into a gift giver, Carlos says "If I know that he's negative and I'm fucking him, it sort of gets me off. I'm murdering him in a sense, killing him slowly, and that's sort of, as sick as it sounds, exciting to me." (Freeman 2003). Louise Hogarth's 2003 documentary *The Gift* takes the same approach. The film opens with a photograph of a pistol superimposed over an erect penis (see Figure 6.1) and includes extensive interviews with a young man talking about how happy he was to become HIV-positive and an older man who cries over discovering that he is HIV-negative. In both cases, bug chasers and gift givers are presented as representative of the entire bareback population with little or no actual consideration of the complex political and health issues involved in serosorting.

Figure 6.1: Promotional image for Hogarth's film, *The Gift*

Scientific discourse has also examined barebacking primarily in terms of pathology. For example, in a review of research on high-risk sexual behavior, Becker et al (1998) give only two basic explanations for condomless sex between men: childhood abuse and substance abuse. As Halperin (2007) notes, the scientific literature focuses on "Why do they do it?" as the primary question driving research on barebacking. In discussing the pathologizing rhetoric of the literature on barebackers, Tomso summarizes the wide range of "explanations" given to this question:

> The list of reasons is already expansive: low self-esteem; the physical pleasures of condomless sex; a "culture of disease" created by glossy HIV-medication ads that equate infection with "popularity and acceptance"; childhood sexual abuse; drug use; rebellion against authority; "sexual self-control deficits"; and the eroticization of risk itself, to name just a few. (2004:90)

This literature portrays barebacking as highly irrational by unstable individuals suffering from a variety of psychological problems. Halperin (2007) argues that this pathologizing rhetoric simply pathologizes homosexuality. For example, studies show that 70% of HIV-negative gay men report consistent condom use compared with 30% of heterosexual HIV-negative men (Halperin 2007). Yet there are no scientific studies assuming that the

majority of heterosexual men who do not use condoms suffer from some psychological disorder.

As Eric Rofes has written, the emphasis on barebackers allows barebackers to be the scapegoat for HIV-transmission diverting attention from the larger public health problem of unintentional unprotected sex:

> Instead of seeing everyday, run-of-the-mill unprotected sex as the primary activity resulting in HIV transmission among gay men (certainly transmission occurs through the sharing of needles, anal sex where condoms fail, and, occasionally, oral sex), people see the barebacking parties and men who cruise the Internet seeking raw sex as *the* culprits transmitting HIV. We reduce our judgments toward other incidents of unprotected anal sex, and reserve our strongest condemnation for those that occur within barebacking parties. (1998: 197)

In contrast, debates about barebacking among gay journalists and academics have tended to focuses much more on the question of serosorting and its ability (or inability) to serve as an effective HIV prevention program. These debates typically use tropes of neoliberalism to frame the barebacking debate in terms of rights concerning control over one's own body. As Adam notes, barebacker discourse regularly involves "notions of informed consent, contractual interaction, free market choice, and responsibility" (Adam 2005: 39).

2.2   Barebacker pornography

Because barebacker identity is built around sexual practice, pornography plays an important role in barebacker culture. The emergence of barebacker pornography has been a particularly volatile issue. Since the late 1980s, the gay male pornography industry has consistently used condoms in their videos. Although condoms are a basic part of mainstream gay pornography, they are almost never used in heterosexual pornography, even though the risk of HIV is present in the production of both types of pornography

(see Moore 2007:76). The most adamant representatives of the opposing views on the morality of barebacker pornography have been the film producers Chi Chi LaRue and Paul Morris. LaRue (a drag queen) has long played an important role in the gay porn industry, working primarily as a producer and director. Like others in the "mainstream" gay porn industry, LaRue insists that condoms are used for all anal intercourse in her films. LaRue gives two distinct arguments against bareback pornography. The first actually appropriates anti-pornography rhetoric that claims that pornography has a performative effect in that leads viewers into accepting and performing the acts portrayed in the films (e.g. MacKinnon 1993). LaRue uses this line of reasoning to argue that bareback pornography will encourage impressionable young men to engage in acts that put them at risk for HIV:

> Most of the time, I am the queen of sleaze. If there are perverted, nasty things you're not supposed to do, I do it. But I can't responsibly show barebacking to a young guy in the Midwest who uses adult videos as a guide or encyclopedia to sex. Because then you have some young kid who worships and emulates porn stars watching an unsafe sex video and thinking it's okay to do it." (Slezak 2001)

LaRue's second argument is about the safety of the actors who star in bareback films. In making bareback films, actors who are negative may be exposed to HIV and actors who are positive may be exposed to drug-resistant strains. LaRue argues that it is immoral to pay people to perform a job that could cause serious health problems or even death. In jobs other than that of "porn star" employers are required to protect their workers, yet bareback porn forces workers to take major risks that could be easily avoided (with the use of a condom).

　　As Dean (2009) notes, barebacker identity emerged before barebacker pornography emerged. This pornography is not responsible for the emergence of

barebacking as a common sexual practice among gay men. This point is made by most vocal advocate for bareback pornography, Paul Morris, founder of Treasure Island Media, one of the most successful companies involved in making bareback pornography. Morris sees the social role of pornography quite different and typically frames his work as a descriptive representation of sexual acts that are already common (rather than representing a fantasy of unprotected sex). Morris argues that his films simply reflect norms that have emerged among gay men:

> The best purpose of pornography is the honest documentation of sexual practice. Since sex is and always will be at the heart of a developing gay culture, honesty and accuracy in sex media are especially important. A culture or a social group becomes vulnerable if its internecine media fail to tell the truth. Ultimately, I have to privilege the dichotomy of "honest/dishonest" over "safe/unsafe. (Slezak 2001)

Morris argues adamantly that there is no relationship between watching acts on film and performing those acts in real life. Instead he argues that pornography serves as a release, allowing men to experience transgressive sexual acts vicariously so that they do not feel the need to perform those acts themselves. Pornography that attempts to impose a normative view on acceptable sexual behavior simply makes the transgressive act more attractive and ends up encouraging the behavior is attempts to prevent:

> Hundreds of serious academic and governmental studies have shown that porn—if it is good porn—functions as a cathartic agent that relieves pent-up sexual energy. It's been shown over and over that porn doesn't lead to any particular kind of behavior, whether it's violent or unsafe. Rather it allows the viewer to live the experience vicariously, to be free from the need or the drive to act unwisely or uncharacteristically. The most famous porn studies from around the world show that cultures that have the most graphic and honest and freely available pornography are also the cultures with the healthiest sexuality. (Slezak 2001)

Morris' view of the risks to actors in bareback films is that the actors make their own decisions. Promotions for Treasure Island films, for example, regularly

portray the actors as 'real' men who desperately desire bareback sex (see below). However, the risk to actors is quite real. In 2008, four young men tested positive for HIV after starring in a bareback film produced in London. The resulting publicity lead one of Britain's main bareback porn companies (Icreme) to switch to condom-only productions (Holt 2008).

2.3   Barebacker as an identity category

The proliferation of websites marketed to gay men looking for other men interested in bareback sex seems to have contributed to the diffusion of *barebacker* as a new identity category. Following O'Hara's example, the practice of marking positive serostatus with tattoos gained in popularity. However, rather than tattooing *HIV-positive* (as O'Hara did), barebackers began using the biohazard symbol used to mark toxic and/or medical waste. Unlike O'Hara's tattoo, the biohazard symbol is restricted in terms of recognition. That is, the biohazard tattoo is only recognizable to those who are familiar with the norms of bareback culture and recognize the indexical association between the symbol and the identity category of HIV-positive barebackers. Some barebackers place the tattoo in places where it would not generally be seen publicly. For example, the bottoms in bareback gangbang pornography sometimes have biohazard tattoos on their asses. Other men may have the tattoo on their necks or shoulders so that their preference for unporteced sex can be recognized before sexual interaction begins.

Figure 6.2: Biohazard Tattoo (photo by the author)

Not surprisingly, the emergence of barebacker as an identity category has resulted in products marketed specifically to barebackers. For example, the Bareback Jack website sells a number of "barebacker products" through its "Whore Store." One can purchase coffee mugs with barebacker slogans such as "Sero-sorting: Spread the love, not the virus" or "Don't hold the cream!" There are t-shirts with identity labels such as "cumslut," "milk extractor," and "milk packers of America." One t-shirt proclaims "BB Pride" with a column of sperm in the colors of the Gay Pride flag. Like the biohazard symbol, however, the initials B.B. may not be generally understood by those not already familiar with barebacker identity.

A number of barebacker slang terms have also emerged (see Bareback Jack 2003b for a bareback glossary). In addition to the terms related to serosorting discussed above, there are terms specifically related to bugchasing and gift giving that focus on the act of virus transmission. Terms referring to the act of infecting one's partner include *charging up* or *pozzing up* (as in "I'll charge you up"). The act of exchange semen (regardless of the serostatus of partners) is often discussed through metaphors of pregnancy (like

impregnate or *knock up*) or artificial insemination (like *breeding* or *inseminating*). Bareback sex is often called *raw* sex and bareback bottoms may refer to themselves with a range of terms emphasizing a desire for semen (*cumdump*, *cum slut*, *cum pig,* etc).

In addition to these various ways of expressing barebacker identity, a series of emergent sexual scripts and norms for social practice have emerged. A number of studies have confirmed that individuals who identify as barebackers do indeed have unprotected sex at higher rates compared to gay men who do not identify as barebackers (Halkitis et al. 2005, Parsons and Bimbi 2007, Grov et al. 2007). However, this does not necessarily mean that all barebackers have unprotected sex regularly. Parsons and Bimbi found, for example, 72% of self-identified barebackers reported having uprotected anal sex in the past three months (compared with 30% of men who did not identify as barebackers).

Although increased frequencies of unprotected anal sex among men who identify as barebackers is not surprising, there are other social practices that seem to be more common among barebackers compared to non-barebackers. These practices include using the internet to search for sexual partners, organizing and attending bareback parties that involve group sex, and the use of methamphetamine, cocaine and/or erectile disfunction medications during sexual interactions. Sociological studies have found that barebackers report significantly higher participation in all three of these practices compared with non-barebackers. These practices form a stereotype of barebacker behavior that serves as the basis for establishing the behavioral norms that are indexically associated with barebacker identity.

Given that barebacker identity emerged primarily through computer-mediated communication, it is not surprising that a number of studies have found that men who

identify as barebackers spend significantly more time seeking sex on the internet compared to men who do not identify as barebackers (e.g. Grov et al. 2007, Elford et al. 2007). Although almost all of the barebackers in Elford et al.'s study sought sexual partners on-line, the partners found on-line were also more likely to be seroconcordant compared to partners found off-line. However, Berry et al. (2008) found that partners found over the internet were no more likely to be serconcordant than partners met in bars and dance clubs. However, men who met partners over the internet were significantly more likely to have unprotected anal intercourse with their (potentially serodiscordant) partners. In a survey of gay men in Los Angeles and New York City, Grov et al. (2007b) found that HIV-positive men were more likely to prefer meeting sexual partners in bathhouses or on-line (as opposed to in clubs), although they found no correlation betweem the venue for meeting sexual partners and increased levels of risk in sexual interactions. Berg (2008) also found that self-identified barebackers were significantly more likely to find partners on internet. The use of the internet to find sexual partners not only facilitates serosorting, but it mitigates the face-threatening act (Brown and Levinson 1987) of having to reveal one's serostatus to a potential sexual partner. Indeed, many internet sites allow men to include their serostatus in their profile, so that other men will have access to the information before initiating conversation. Thus, for many HIV-positive men, the internet allow for individuals to screen potential sexual partners for serocondcordance before any interaction occurs.

With the rise of barebacker identity, condom-free sex parties became a primary component of stereotyped barebacker identity. These parties are generally announced on barebacker websites. In some larger cities, there are barebacker clubs that hold parties on

a regular basis. The sex at barebacker parties often involves the "gang bang" sexual script in which a number of tops have intercourse with the same bottom. In addition to providing a safe space for unsafe sex, barebacker parties serve to foster a sense of barebacker community by creating a social network of men who attend such parties on a regular basis.

Another feature of stereotypical barebacker sexual scripts is the use of recreational drugs during sexual interactions, particularly at barebacking parties. The drugs involved are usually stimulants that allow the user to participate in sexual activities for a longer period of time. Erectile dysfunction drugs like Viagra might be used to allow men to maintain an erection for the duration of a bareback party. Sociological studies differ on the degree to which drug use actually correlates with barebacker identity. For example, Elford et al. (2007) found that London barebackers were more likely to use recreational drugs while Berg (2008) found no correlation between barebacker identity and use of crystal methamphetamine (the drug most commonly associated with barebacker parties). Parsons and Bimbi (2007) also found that self-identified barebackers in New York City were significantly more likely to have recently used crystal methamphetamine or cocaine, the primary drugs for PnP (Party and Play). Halkitis et al (2005) also found that self-identified barebackers used drugs during sexual interactions at significantly higher raters than non-barebackers. Although the practice of using stimulants during bareback parties organized over the internet has become a stereotypical barebacker sexual script, this in no way implies that all (or even the majority) or barebackers participate in such practices. Although studies have found that barebackers

combine sex and drugs more frequently than gay men who do not identify as barebackers, these men do not represent the majority of barebackers in these studies.

2.4 Barebacker gender ideology

Barebacker discourse emphasizes sexual impusliveness, individual responsibility, and fearless risk-taking as traits indexing barebacker masculinity. Barebackers present themselves as both highly responsible and sexually compulsive. Within barebacker gender ideology, masculine men should be independent and take responsibility for their own actions. Barebacker discourse also links unprotected (*raw*) sex with masculine sexual impulsiveness. The indexical disjuncture created by indexing rational, responsible behavior with sexual impulsivity is reconciled through narratives of socialization into barebacker culture. These narratives also become an important site for the construction of barebacker masculinity (see Coates 2003).

The view of barebacking as rough, raw and masculine runs through bareback pornography. Particularly within the gangbang genre, masculinity is repeatedly indexed by both bottoms and tops in bareback pornography. In both films and marketing literature, bottoms are presented as sexually insatiable men who long to be "used" by other men. For example, some of the bottoms in Treasure Island Media films are said to have sent Paul Morris letters begging to be used or offered to pay Morris to let them be the bottom in his films. The bottom is marked by his ability to "take it like a man" and withstand sustained anal intercourse with multiple partners. The tops in these films are more vocal than the bottom. As one top has intercourse with the bottom, it is common for the other tops to slap the bottom with their erections or wave their penises in the bottom's face as they utter taunts. The end result is reminiscent of being "jumped into" a gang in

which the initiate proves their masculinity by enduring the pain and degradation inflicted by other gang members. Such "hypermasculine" scenes are not at all uncommon in other (i.e. condom-using) gay male pornography. Indeed, group sex in all-male settings is a regular theme of gay pornography, particularly with scenes involving military bases, prisons, fraternity houses or other male-centered contexts. However, barebacker pornography often centers around aggressive gangbang scenarios. Bareback pornography is also marked by its emphasis on "real" men. Bareback porn rarely includes the shaved "muscle boys" (the physical type associated with circuit boys) found in other gay pornography. Indeed, Treasure Island Media sometimes sponsors orgies that are announced on the internet, reinforcing the idea that the actors are everyday individuals. The men in bareback pornography are generally presented as working-class men who are relatively ungroomed compared to the actors in other gay male pornography. For example, actors in Treasure Island Media films often have full body hair and typically wear jeans, tank tops, flannel shirts and baseball caps. Similar to the case of bears (see Chapter Four), barebacker style uses indexical markers of social class serve to evoke masculinity. However, unlike bears, barebacker working-class signs are not linked to any specific regional identity. Thus, the use of working class signs in barebacker culture does not seem to deter men of color from adopting a barebacker identity. This may contribute to the fact that barebackers are one of the most racially diverse gay subcultures (see Dean 2009).

In addition to masculine signs associated with working class identity, the willingness to take risks in one's sexuality may be symbolic of "toughness" and condoms may be linked to fear and femininity. For example, the introduction to the website

www.bareback.com attempts to frame the warning about bareback sexual content in terms of masculinity, directly calling the reader *pussy* if they decide not to actually enter the site.

1) Welcome to BAREBACK.COM. This site has been created for the bareback community. If you are a pig, a bear, a cub, a twink, or just a nasty guy looking for raw, man-on-man action, this site is for you. Our guys fuck and suck without any barriers, lectures or bullshit.

   If you are unfamiliar with homosexual sex, are offended by homoerotic content or have no idea what we are talking about, now is your chance to flee, you pussy. This site contains highly graphic imagery and text. If it is a violation of the standards of your community or if you find graphic content personally offensive, you should leave now.

   To view, bookmark or otherwise use this site you must agree to the following:

   You are not a wimp, wuss or pussy.

   You want hard, man-to-man action.

   You are over 18 years of age or the legal age required in your community.

   You will not redistribute the material in this site to anyone.

   You take full responsibility for any and all communications with people on this site.

   You are not from a government agency or any organization seeking to obtain any information to use against the site operator, advertiser, or any person connected to this site in any way. You understand the standards and laws of the community, site and computer from which you are access these materials and are solely responsible for your actions.

   You waive all claims of liability against BAREBACK.COM and its proprietors by clicking "Cum In" below.

Below the message are two links labeled "Cum In" and "Pull Out," equating entering the site with the sexual script of semen exchange.

There is a clear conflict between the required legal language restricting access to the site (e.g. *you are over 18 years of age or the legal age required in your community*) and the hyper-masculine taunts (e.g. *you are not a wimp, wuss or pussy*). By indexing conflicting registers, the authors mitigate the face-threat imposed by the legal language, challenging the reader to "cum in" despite the fact that they must agree to a broad range of legal conditions. The reader is taunted for potentially being afraid of unprotected sex (*now is your chance to flee, you pussy*). Rather than showing poor moral judgment, men who have unprotected sex are displaying bravery.

2.5   Barebacker sexblogs

Sexblogs are websites where individuals post detailed descriptions (or fictionalizations) of their own (purported) sexual encounters. Sexblogs are particularly popular among barebackers. The data presented here are taken from several different barebacker sexblogs, including *rawTOP*, *Chronicles of a young slut*, and *Squirt hungry guy in the city*. As with traditional first-person erotic narratives (such as those in *Penthouse Forum*), the erotic stories posted on sexblogs may not always be accurate representations of actual experiences. Indeed, bloggers sometimes openly challenge or question the validity of the narratives posted by other bloggers (see below).

Barebacker sexblogs vary widely. Some simply provide personal sex diaries with no images, while others contain numerous commercial links to bareback pornography websites. While some simply convey past experiences, other actively seek sexual encounters by having readers contact them if they are interested in having bareback sex. Many bareback sexblogs link to profiles on dating or 'hook-up' websites so that potential partners can follow a link to read about the sexblogger's sexual experiences. Most

provide links to other sexblogs (occasionally with reports of encounters between two bloggers) and some allow readers to post personal advertisements seeking unprotected sex.

Public health discourse emphasizes an ideology of protected sex in which failure to use a condom is an immoral act because it potentially puts one's sexual partner at risk. In contast, barebackers espouse an ideology of informed consent in which unprotected sex is not immoral if both men know and understand the risks they are taking. The ideology of informed consent frames the question of unrpotected sex in terms of (neoliberal) individual responsibility (see Adam 2005). Individuals should become informed about HIV and both parties should consent to unprotected sex, but discussing serostatus with one's partner is not always necessary. Although some barebacker blogs emphasize the importance of informing one's partner about serostatus, it is certainly not emphasized. If an individual is willing to have unprotected sex, it is assumed that he has studied and considered the risks before giving consent and that he is therefore unconcerned about his partner's serostatus.

Although most barebackers openly declare a preference for unprotected sex, barebacker narratives frequently frame decisions about condom use in terms of informed consent based upon knowledge of the potential risks involved. The displays of knowledge and consideration for one's partner also serve to convey moral stances through implicatures that only hold within the ideology of informed consent. Through the use of stance, barebackers reframe the discourse on safe sex by asserting moral stance related to informed consent. This contrasts with public health discourse focusing on condom use,

where the primary moral question is the potential to inflict harm by infecting one's sexual partner.

3.0   Stance and barebacker identity

Because indexical signs resonate across indexical orders (Silverstein 2003), linguistic markers of identity may serve to index stance, or the way in which speakers orient (or position) themselves with respect to an on-going interaction (see DuBois 2007, Goodwin 2007, Jaffe 2009). Building on studies of how speakers orient towards one another during an interaction (e.g. Goffman 1974, 1981, Davies and Harré 1990), sociocultural linguists have recently used the term *stance* to refer to such speaker orientations. DuBois presents a framework for understanding stance in terms of both how speakers evaluate the utterances of their interlocutors and how speakers evaluate stance objects that serve as the focus of an interaction. Jaffe (2009) argues that the concept of stance allows researchers to examine the ways in which speakers orient themselves to "meta-stance objects" (such as language ideologies) in addition to analyzing the ways in which relationships between speakers in an interaction are established. Although most research on interactional orientation has focused on linguistic behavior within an on-going interaction, the inclusion of (meta-)stance objects allows analysts to consider how interactions are shaped by stances towards ideologies, public discourses or material objects.

Goodwin (2007:70-71) proposes several broad categories of stance that speakers may employ during interactions:

> **Instrumental stance**: the placement of entities in ways required by the activity in progress or the ways in which speakers position themselves with respect to physical objects present in an interaction.

> **Epistemic stance**: the ways in which speakers index knowledge and perceptions related to an interaction.
> **Cooperative stance**: using language and gesture to demonstrate collaborative participation in the activity at hand.
> **Moral stance:** behaving in a way to demonstrate that the speaker can be trusted to collaborate in the activity involved in the interaction.
> **Affective stance:** expressing the emotional state of a speaker, particularly with regard to the current interaction.

Although Goodwin's categories are rather broad and do not account for all possible stances (particularly those involving meta-stance objects), they provide a useful rubric for analyzing the ways in which barebackers' use of stance serves to link meta-stance objects to barebacker identity.

In the data analyzed in this chapter, barebackers use affective, cooperative, and epistemic stances to imply that they are moral actors through conversational implicature. By avoiding direct expressions of moral stance and highlighting other interactional stances, barebackers are able to position themselves as rational actors in sexual interactions without overtly addressing the question of morality associated with intentional unprotected sex. Barebackers also use affective and instrumental stance to orient themselves with respect to condoms and seminal fluid as material objects. Although Goodwin's instrumental stance refers to entities involved in an interaction, barebackers use instrumental stance to produce a general orientation with respect to the substance of semen. Similarly, affective stance may be used to index a specific emotional and psychological orientation to seminal fluid. This overlap between instrumental and affective stance allows (some) barebackers to index an essentialized fetish for seminal fluid as an innate and uncontrollable aspect of identity.

3.1   Epistemic Stance

Sexblogs and bareback websites open a discursive space for the discussion of sexual risks in a non-face-threatening environment (or less threatening). Often, bareback sexbloggers will post discussions about their decision to be barebackers. These discussions often involve repetitions of a narrative trope of barebacker socialization. This standard narrative begins with concern and/or fear of contracting HIV, followed by a period of research and learning about the disease. After this period of learning, the narrator accepts the possibility of seroconversion, overcomes fear of HIV and comes to identify as a barebacker. The choice to become a barebacker opens a world of sexual freedom, unconstrained by worries over the possibility of become HIV-positive. These barebacker "coming out" narratives include numerous markers of epistemic stance. For example, the author of "Bare Encounters" (from Omaha, Nebraska) describes his decision to "take poz loads" as based on consideration of the very real possibility of seroconversion (forms associated with epistemic stance are underlined):

2) <u>I don't think</u> of myself as a chaser, although <u>a friend of mine equates</u> being a chaser to being "a neg bottom that takes poz loads." <u>I think it is a little more complex</u> than that. Do I seek to become HIV positive? No. ...but <u>I have accepted the fact</u> that it will, inevitably happen. Call it an occupational hazard if you will. I'm okay with that.

Unlike many people who fear HIV, I do not. <u>I sat down and became educated about the virus and realized</u> that unlike a decade ago people who have HIV can live well into old age. In other words, <u>it's no longer the death sentence it used to be</u>. I'm not going to let a chance for really good sex pass me by just because someone has HIV.

http://www.bareencounters.net/2008/06/why-do-you-bareback.html
June 17, 2008

Although the temporal sequence of the events moves from past to present, the structure of the narrative involves a progression of epistemic states. The narrative begins with

contemplation of the possibility of contracting HIV (*I don't think, a friend thinks, I think it's more complex*) followed by acceptance of the likelihood of seroconversion (*I accepted*). The narrative then proceeds to the acquisition of knowledge (*I sat down and became educated*) followed by expert assertions involving knowledge about HIV (*It's not the death sentence it used to be*). The acquisition of knowledge results in the absence of fear (*Unlike many people who fear HIV, I do not*). The ultimate decision to not "let a chance for really good sex pass me by just because someone has HIV" certainly reflects the sort of disregard for risk that drives the "condom every time" message in public health discourse. However, this decision is presented through markers of epistemic stance, indexing a rational choice following careful research and contemplation. The use of epistemic stance thus challenges the dominant public health ideology that treats barebacking as an entirely irrational symptom of psychological pathology.

The authors of barebacker blogs frequently make direct references to information that they have uncovered in researching sexually transmitted diseases. Some blogs emphasize this aspect of barebacker identity and include detailed discussion boards presenting competing views about barebacking as a practice and HIV-transmission more generally. Often, bloggers will use these discussions to further convey their expert knowledge concerning sexual health. These discussions may include the use of statistics, direct references to specific research studies, medical jargon, or claims of expert knowledge. An example can be found in a series of postings by RawTop describing a bout with syphillis (called "Why I haven't been fucking much lately"). In the following excerpt, RawTop complains about the public health worker who visited him after he tested positive for syphillis. RawTop doubts the public health worker claims and includes

links to the public health information websites to support his view of proper syphillis treatment:

> 3) At one point she told me I shouldn't be having sex for 6 to 8 weeks which just didn't sound right to me. I've never heard anything like that. So once she was gone I looked it up and she was, indeed, wrong. According to the CDC…
>
> Persons who receive syphilis treatment must abstain from sexual contact with new partners until the syphilis sores are completely healed. [Source] Which is exactly what I did… Needless to say, I trust the doctors and epidemiologists writing the CDC web site way more than I trust some lowly paid DOH employee with a shit job no one else wants. And guess what, even the web site of her own agency disagrees with her…
>
> Don't have sex until you … have been completely treated and all of your symptoms have disappeared [Source]
>
> All in all she was just incredibly judgmental and rude – and she didn't even have her facts straight.
> http://www.rawtop.com/blog/2010-02/why-i-havent-been-fucking-much-lately

Here, RawTop positions himself as better informed that the worker from the Department of Health *with a shit job no one else wants*. Her advice on how to treat syphilis *just didn't sound right* so he *looked it up* and discovered that *she was, indeed, wrong.* By aligning himself with *doctors and epidemiologists* at the CDC, RawTop positions himself as more of an expert than the health worker he criticizes. In establishing himself as an expert on sexually transmitted diseases, RawTop even goes so far as to post a graph displaying rates of syphillis infection in New York City:

> 4) Just for the hell of it, here's a graph that shows the current "epidemic" she was telling me about. I find it fascinating that there was a huge spike around 1990 when everyone was using condoms and being very conscious of their sexual health.
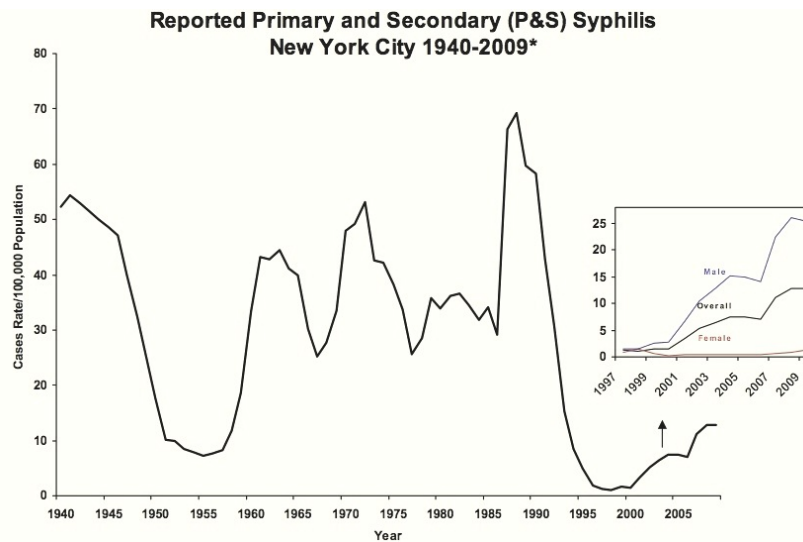
Figure 6.3: RawTop's graph of Syphillis infection rates:
http://www.rawtop.com/blog/2010-02/why-i-havent-been-fucking-much-lately

Although RawTop includes the graph "just for the hell of it," the graph indexes scientific authority and further supports the expert status that RawTop claims through his use of epistemic stance.

Decisions about condom use are also central in sexblogs that post sexual narratives (without overt discussions of sexual health). These desicions may not always be based on the soundest principles. However, instances in which epistemic stance indexes rational and informed decision-making are still common. For example, Volsex writes describes being nervous over unprotected sex with two "farm boys" that he met at an adult videostore in eastern Kentucky because the men did not groom their pubic hair (a normative practice among many gay men):

5) He stood up and I knelt down and sucked his cock into my mouth. These guys were real farm boys, I mean there was no groin grooming going on here, so his cock was a hairy mess. Well, a hot hairy mess, but I powered through and exhibited my fellatory talents as the two Farm Boys made out.

I may be a slut, but this is the kind of situation that calls for caution. (Digression--I once heard an old guy at my grandpa's farm say about the kind of women that hung out at the roadhouse down the highway that you would need to coat your peter in concrete before you took a dip in them....I

> mean these guys looked pretty clean cut in an East Tennessee way, but I'm not a total idiot)

http://volsex.blogspot.com/search/label/barebacking December 25, 2008

The idea that the men were "real" farm boys is based primarily on the fact that their pubic hair has not been trimmed. Even though they look "clean cut" the do not seem like safe sexual partners because their unkempt pubes index a rural working-class identity associated with ignorance and detachment from modern society. Volsex assumes that the hillbillies with hairy testicles are probably so removed from gay cultural norms that they might be unfamiliar with the actual risks involved in various sexual interactions. This is certainly not the only (or even the best) logical conclusion. Indeed, an lack of familiarity with the social norms of urban gay men could just as well suggest that the men are unlikely to have slept with a high number of gay men beyond Appalachia making them potentially "safer" partners compared to men from urban centers who know that they should groom their pubic hair. Although it may not be entirely reasonable, VolSex's decision is framed in terms of epistemic stance (*I'm not an idiot*) and is constructed as rational choice based on prior knowledge.

Barebacker discourse often highlights epistemic stances as a way of indexing the ideology of informed consent with regard to unsafe sex. By referencing medical knowledge and scientific studies, barebackers orient themselves as experts on HIV. This expert status legitimizes barebacker opposition to public health official. Epistemic stance is also used to index a context of rational and informed decision-making, positioning barebackers in opposition to representations of barebackers as pathological or irrational.

3.2   Cooperative Stance

Although less common than markers of epistemic stance, markers of cooperative stance are also a regular part of barebacker blog discourse. Stories of sexual encounters may include discussions of sexual negotiations. Usually, these involve discussions over condom use, but they may also involve other aspects of sexual interaction as in the following example from the blog *Chronicles of a young slut* (who identifies as a 19-year-old New Yorker). "Young Slut" claims to usually ask tops to pull out before exchanging semen in an effort to reduce the probability of seroconversion. However, in an encounter with a professor (who he refers to as "Prof. Daddy"), the young slut decides that he has found "the one," the man with whom he wants to share the level of intimacy indexed by the act of semen exchange:

6) Anyway, so last week, we were having sex (I let him fuck me bare) when I got an idea. "I can trust you, right, Daddy?" I asked as I was on my back getting pounded. "Of course you can," he replies. "Do you promise, Daddy?" "Yes, I promise," he says. After a slight pause, I asked a question I had never asked before. "Will you cum inside me, Daddy?" This was completely new territory for me. I've been fucked bareback a bunch of times by a few different guys, but they had all agreed to pull out before they shot their loads. I had always wanted to have a guy cum in my ass, but I wanted to wait until it was one that I trusted. Prof. Daddy was the one.

"Please, Daddy?" "Only if you want me to." It was nice that he made sure I wanted it, rather than just immediately unload in my hole.

http://chroniclesofayoungslut.blogspot.com/2007/02/first-time-sort-of.html (February 20, 2007)

In this example, the request for Prof Daddy to not ejaculate inside Young Slut is prefaced with two exchanges (adjacency pairs) between the two men:

7) YS: I can trust you, right, Daddy?
   PD: Of course you can.
   YS: Do you promise Daddy?

> PD: Yes, I promise.
> YS: Will you cum inside me, Daddy? Please Daddy?
> PD: Only if you want me to.

Here, the use of *trust* and *promise* marks cooperative stance. Young Slut's questions request evaluations of the interaction from his sexual partner. The inclusion of dialogues establishing intimacy between sexual partners is not common in barebacker erotic narratives. This interaction highlights an association between semen exchange and emotional intimacy (discussed below). The final line of the example (*It was nice that he made sure I wanted it, rather than just immediately unload in my hole*) indexes the barebacker ideology of informed consent.

Despite the assertions of a bareback identity that celebrates unprotected anal intercourse, virtually all of the barebacker sexbloggers choose to use condoms in certain situations, particularly if their sexual partner prefers to have safe sex. Bloggers also discuss using condoms for the sake of their partner and may reference cooperative stance to reinforce the "consent" aspect of the ideology of informed consent that dominates barebacker discourse.

"Squirt Hungry", a blogger from San Francisco, admits to accepting condoms if his partner prefers safe sex (or if he feels uncomfortable having unprotected sex with a specific partner). In a posting called *Mind-blowing fuck in the video store – who says playing safe is boring!*, "Squirt Hungry" describes an encounter where he chose to use a condom:

8) He asks if I like to fuck or get fucked - I say I love to get fucked. His next question is if I play safe....yes I do (I will never say no to a condom if asked, I had one guy get extra pissy this week with me online - it is a decision between two adults and we all have a choice to say yes or no to any type of sexual situation).

In this particular encounter, "Squirt Hungry" describes fantasizing about receiving semen while he is the middle of sex with a condom:

9) He says my hole is extra tight and feels sweet around his cock - I can only says thanks and take another breath as he buries himself deep and keeps going.

   While he is buried he asks if I would like to be in a hotel room with Texas truckers using my ass and those hung college Texans all shooting loads all over me. FUCK YES!

By suggesting the fantasy of truckers and college students from Texas "shooting loads," Hungry's sexual partner acknowledges Hungry's barebacker identity even in the middle of having unprotected sex.

Other bloggers, such as RawTop, also discuss always using a condom if that's what their sexual partner prefers. Narratives of barebackers having safe sex serve index status as a cooperative participant in a sexual interaction and emphasize the question of informed consent rather than the actual practice of unsafe sex. Such narratives also serve to legitimize barebacker as an identity, by distinguishing barebacking as a sexual practice from identifying as someone who prefers sex without a condom.

3.2   Moral stance

The use of epistemic and cooperative stance in barebacker blogs establishes indexical alignments with the ideology of informed consent, but also allows barebackers to avoid directly addressing the question of morality as understood within the public health ideology of protected sex (use a condom every time). Epistemic and cooperative stance index traits of being knowledgable, rational, honest, and considerate of others. These traits allow barebackers to imply that they are morally upstanding citizens despite being committed to sexual practices that are often depicted as inherently immoral.

The most common context in which questions of morality arise on barebacker blogs is in accusations of hypocrisy. For example, RawTOP writes on the hypocrisy of the individuals who promote (older) "pre-condom" pornography, while criticizing contemporary bareback pornography.

10) Think about it for a minute - if you didn't use a condom in the 80s it could actually kill you in a matter of a few short years. Compare that to now, where if you bareback, and start treatment within a reasonable amount of time after infection, it may not kill you at all. So the people who think "barebacking" (their definition) is evil (or at least horribly, horribly wrong), are fine with the far deadlier version of barebacking which they've called by another name - "pre-condom".
http://www.rawtop.com/blog/2009-01/the-anti-bareback-crowd-is-funny-sometimes

The implication of RawTop's argument is that if condomless sex is indeed immoral, it is less immoral than it used to be. Hypocrisy, on the other hand, is just as immoral as it has always been. Although the posting drew responses from some who thought that RawTop did not take the issue of seroconversion seriously enough, it reflects the general attitude that the introduction of HAART has made the ideology of protected sex irrelevant.

Authors of bareback sexblogs are often critical of the lack of open discussion about serostatus among barebackers. Some barebackers assume that they are being safe through serosorting even though their sexual partners may not be honest about their serostatus or may not even know their serostatus. Others may not even discuss serostatus, simply avoiding the face-threat and assuming that their partner is seroconcordant. The author of *Sexcapades* writes about attendees at a bareback party in Atlanta becoming angry over the idea of a premeditated seroconversion:

11) In planning that one [party] though, one thing really surprised me. The bottom boy had specifically asked for lots of poz cum in his neg hole. When I sent out the email invitation, several guys wrote back outraged that this guy wanted to take poz cum. Some of these guys are regular

> attendees at my parties so they are quite active in the whole barebacking scene. Are they really naive enough to think we're all swapping neg cum and guys are always completely honest about their status? Two guys even asked to be taken off the email distribution list. I realize that chasing and converting is a bit of a taboo topic, and one step further down the path of raunchiness, but the self-righteousness of these guys took me off guard. I guess some guys don't like to admit to the risk and would rather "don't ask, don't tell," but it really surprised me.
>
> http://gaysexcapades.typepad.com/home/2008/09/bad-news-good-news.html (September 21, 2008)

The "outraged" men are criticized for being "self-righteous" for refusing to participate in the conversion party. While it is entirely possible that the men have already transmitted HIV to partners at barebacker parties, they refuse to do so knowingly. The author does not address the moral issues that arise from a conversion party other than to say that it is a *taboo topic and one setp further downt he path of raunchiness*. Raising the moral question that is central to the ideology of protected sex results in criticism of being either "naïve" or "self-righteous."

The discourse of barebacker blogs frames the question of unprotected sex in terms of an ideology of informed consent, in which the individual (and not his partner) is responsible for making an educated and rational decision about condom use. Through indexing epistemic and cooperative stance and avoiding markers of moral stance, individual barebackers align themselves with the ideology of informed consent. In addition to establishing group identity through shared ideologies, these alignments serve to reframe the discourse of "safe sex." Within this reworking of safe sex discourse, questions of knowledge and morality are no longer dominated by public health organization but must be resolved through individual responsibility.

4.0   Semen and barebacker identity

In addition to orientations towards public health discourse, barebacker identity may be indexed through stances towards both condoms and seminal fluid. References to condoms and semen often involve discussions of semen exchange, which is central to barebacker ideologies of sexuality. After discussing the role of semen exchange in barebacker culture, this section examines the ways in which individual instrumental and affective stances towards semen serve in the construction of a *cumslut* identity that serves as a subcategory of barebackers. The section concludes by discussing the ways in which discursive use of kinship metaphors to link semen exchange to an imagined barebacker community.

4.1   Instrumental stance and ritual semen exchange

The stereotypical barebacker sexual script does not culminate in orgasm, but with the exchange of semen, the most transgressive sexual act in public discourse involving HIV prevention efforts. The emphasis on seminal fluid extends unprotected anal intercourse to include a general fetishization of semen. Indeed, discussion forums on barebacker websites often include discussions specifically focused on semen rather than sex. These discussion usually involve instrumental stances towards semen, including discussions of different ways in which semen may be manipulated both within and beyond sexual interactions. Examples include increasing the amount of seminal fluid one produces by taking gufaienesin (an over-the-counter expectorant), mixing semen with chewing tobacco so that one could taste it periodically throughout the day, and various ways to store semen or ship it to other barebackers through the mail.

As a cultural symbol, semen is often treated as possessing special properties beyond reproductive potential. The most widely-examined examples are the insemination rituals formerly practiced in parts of Papua New Guinea (e.g. Herdt 1994). Indeed, one of the most basic sexual scripts for barebackers is *bukkake*, a script (borrowed from Japan) in which multiple men ejaculate onto some part of a single person's body or into a container. The sexual script of bukkake is a common trope in bareback culture, although it is only occasional referred to by the term itself.

Although there are variations, the stereotypical sexual script in gay pornography remained basically unchanged through the height of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. The basic pattern of gay pornography follows a fairly predictable script beginning with mutual fellatio followed by anal intercourse. Typically, the first man to perform fellatio is the bottom for the intercourse that follows. The interaction ends with the top pulling out an ejaculating onto the bottom, followed by the bottom ejaculating on himself. Throughout the 1990s, this basic script has changed only in that a condom appears when the anal intercourse begins, but is removed before showing ejaculation. As Moore argues for heterosexual porn, "the release of seminal fluid…authenticates the pornographic film in that sexual desire, the arousal, and the performance are seemingly based on'real' desire" (Moore 2007:78)

One might expect that bareback pornography would follow the typical time-honored pattern and simply not include condoms. However, bareback pornography breaks with the traditional script in its specific emphasis on the exchange of semen (rather than ejaculation itself) as the climactic point of sex. In bareback pornography, the interaction does not usually end with the top pulling out before ejaculating. Rather than

showing the top ejaculating, bareback porn usually focuses on seminal fluid draining from the bottom's anus. In cases where ejaculation is shown on film, the semen is collected (usually by hand or scraped up with the top's erect penis) and inserted into bottom's anus. Other than the presence/absence of condoms, the difference instrumental stances towards semen mark the primary difference between bareback pornography and more mainstream forms of gay male pornography.

Bareback pornography also differs in that the traditional script in which fellatio leads to anal sex is sometimes broken down into two distinct scripts. Treasure Island Media, for example, divides its films into "bareback" films (involving unprotected sex) and "swallow" films involving fellatio. Just as scenes in the bareback films end when the semen is shown leaving the bottom's anus, the swallow films end with the bottom consuming the tops semen (either by having it shot directly into the bottom's mouth or by collecting and swallowing it). For example, the term *snowballing* refers to the practice of orally passing seminal fluid between sexual partners, adding another form of semen fetish to bareback sexual scripts. In films such as *Drunk on Cum, Slurpin' Jizz,* and *Damon Blows America*, Treasure Island presents movies that focus primarily on the oral ingestion of semen. In a number of Treasure Island "swallow" films, the climactic moment is when the fellator drinks a martini glass filled with semen collected from the various men he has fellated (as in Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4: Still from Treasure Island Media's *Drunk on Cum 3*

Treasure Island's bareback films are also focused on the exchange of semen, as evidenced by titles such as *Cumsloppy Buttholes, Knocked Up, Sperm Bank,* and *Plantin' Seed.* In the Treasure Island Media film, *Breeding Mike O'Neill* (Morris 2002), the film opens with a number of men ejaculating into a glass. The mix of seminal fluid is then frozen and the "popsicle" of semen is then inserted into O'Neill's rectum. The use of semen popsicles or ice cubes is a recurring bareback script. With the use of frozen semen, the sexual encounter ceases to be about actual intercourse (indeed, it need not even occur). Rather than having sex in the traditional sense, such interactions are entirely focused on the exchange of semen. The use of instrumental stances serves to position seminal fluid as the central component of sexual interaction. As semen comes to be more important than sexual contact, some barebackers come to discuss sexual acts purely in terms of *loads* (of semen).

The discourse of bareback sexuality focuses not on numbers of partners or orgasms, but rather on the number of loads exchanged (either given or received), as in the Treasure Island Media film title, *Dawson's 50- load weekend*. In the sexblog by rawTOP,

details of sexual encounters are separated into those in which semen is exchanged

("giving loads") and those in which anal intercourse occurs, but doesn't result in semen

exchange. This distinction is quite clear in a posting called "My sex life in 2008":

12) I had 89 hookups involving anal sex. In those 89 hookups I gave the
    bottom my load 67 times. In terms of hookups that's a good improvement
    over the 42 total hookups in 2007 and the 37 total hookups in 2006. In
    terms of total loads that's a huge improvement from 2007 when I gave 24
    loads and 2006 when I gave 21 loads. I exceeded my maximum goal that I
    set at the beginning of the year for of 52 loads.
    http://www.rawtop.com/blog/2009-01/my-sex-life-in-2008   (January   1,
    2009)

In contrast to rawTOP, who counts both loads and intercourse without loads, the author

of *Sexcapades* only counts the loads themselves. The author of *Sexcapades* (by a self-

proclaimed "gay slut" from Atlanta who "needs a hot cumdump" wherever he goes) posts

the "cum score" in a competition he maintains with two friends:

Cum Score (2008)		
WHORE	ASS	MOUTH
Robbie	35	3
Mario	27	0
Me	15	39

Table 2: "Cum Score" from gaysexcapades (2008)
http://gaysexcapades.typepad.com/

The shift from instances of sexual intercourse to *loads* places semen exchange at the

center of sexual interaction.

Similarly, discussions of condoms may involve their role in semen exchange

rather than their potential for preventing HIV-transmission. Indeed, rawTOP argues that

perhaps the only reasonable use of condoms is as a means of collecting semen for such

exchanges:

13) Guys, if you're going to use condoms - this is how you should do it... If
    you're a top and worried about catching something - fuck the bottom,
    dump your load in the condom, and then empty the condom into the
    bottom's ass. Of course, I HIGHLY recommend you just lose the condom,

> but at least your cum won't go to waste the other way...
> http://www.rawtop.com/porn/2008-03/jack-manhole-gets-gangbanged
> (posted on March 28, 2008)

As with collecting semen to make ice cubes or popsicles, the use of condoms here is primarily to collect semen to transfer to the bottom.

The use of instrumental stance priveleges semen as more important that any other aspect of a sexual interaction. This emphasis on semen becomes central to barebacker identity, particularly among men who claim to have an essential and innate sexual desire directed towards seminal fluid. For these *cumsluts*, affective stance may serve to index an individual's alginment with seminal fluid as a potential object of sexual desire.

4.2   Cumslut identity and affective stance

The pathologizing view of barebackers assumes that a gay man's decision to not use a condom is inherently irrational. However, in describing their motivations to forgo condoms, barebackers typically give fairly rational answers. In addition to monogamous seroconcordant relationships (the most common explanation), the men in Huebner 's study gave "physical sensation" as the second most common reason for not using condoms (Huebner et al 2006). Sexual scripts involving the fetishization of seminal fluid certainly predate barebackers and there are even forms of heterosexual pornography that portray "cum fetishes." (Moore 2007). However, barebacker identity links such sexual scripts to specific social identities, further essentializing the relationship between a desire (for semen) and (barebacker) identity.

With the emphasis on semen exchange and the fetishization of seminal fluid, the persona of the "cumslut" emerged as a specific participant role in bareback scripts. The cumslut (also called *cumwhore, cumpig, or cumpdump*) is a gay man with a virtually

insatiable desire for semen, either swallowed or inserted in the anus. As a participant in sexual scripts, the cumslut can be seen as a way of naturalizing a desire for bareback sex. For a cumslut, the choice to have unprotected anal intercourse is represented as the inevitable outcome of an innate and uncontrolable desire for semen.

In barebacker pornography, the desire for semen is highly celebrated. In marketing its films, Treasure Island Media portrays specific actors and being unable to control their desire for semen. For example, Damon Dogg, who stars in the "swallow" film series *Damon Blows America* is described as so thirsty for semen that he goes into gay bars and offers to buy men drinks in exchange for semen. As director Paul Morris says, "My favorite part of that scene is when you can hear Damon offering to buy guys shots if they'll feed him their load. He does that all the time in SF, which goes a long way toward explaining why Damon is always broke, but with a belly full of semen." (quoted in Reed 2003) Similarly, a number of the bottoms in Treasure Island's barebacking gangbang videos are reported to have written to Morris offering to pay him money in exchange for letting them be used by a roomful of men.

The film, *Bad Influence,* made for Treasure Island Media by London director Liam Cole, centers around the idea of an insatiable desire for semen. The film focuses on getting "cum junkies" to engage in sexual acts they would not normally perform. As it is marketed as representative of Treasure Island's "cum cult":

14) In BAD INFLUENCE, our new London director LIAM COLE lures fresh-faced young men into the notorious cum-cult that is Paul Morris's Treasure Island Media.

Like an evangelist for the T.I.M. cult, LIAM always looks for new ways to convert men: whether it's having an 18-year old hypnotized into being a cum-slut; talking a young actor into ruining his career by taking loads up

his fine ass on-camera; or throwing temptation in the path of a closeted bi-guy by getting him away from his girlfriend and putting a fat juicy cock inches from his mouth to test just how much the guy can resist (not much).

http://www.treasureislandmedia.com/TreasureIslandMedia_2007/xcart/pro

duct.php?productid=16355

The film includes interviews with these men (complete with subtitles for audiences who may have difficulty understanding the British accents) in which they discuss their sexual desires. The scene in which the 18-year old is convinced under hypnosis that he simply cannot get enough semen in his rectum is the most controversial aspect of the film. The director states that the man wanted to be used, but that he was camera shy and requested the hypnosis to make him comfortable in the making of the film. In the film, Carl Jacobs, the young actor who "ruins his career" by appearing in a bareback gay porn video, explains his actions as resulting from his insatiable desire for semen. When asked what is "so good" about having men cum inside him, Jacobs naturalizes his desire:

15) It's primal. It's just animal. It's nature. It's what we've done right from the very beginning. I don't know why. It just turns me on. (pause) I started to get hard thinking about that.

In describing semen exchange, Jacobs refers to it as *primal* and *animal*. It is not explainable because it is simply "nature," an innate sexual desire. In stating that discussing semen exchange has caused him to have an erection, Jacobs demonstrates his inability to control the desire for semen. Later in the interview, Jacobs is asked the feeling he gets knowing he is going to take multiple loads:

16) Liam: What's the feeling like, being with a group of men, and knowing that they're all gonna cum inside you?

Carl: (11 second pause) Does the smile not just say enough? (points at mouth) Do I actually have to answer that? (pause) Cum is the best

lube, and its just horny to see and feel.

Again, Jacobs naturalizes his desire. He takes an extraordinarily long time to answer the question, finally saying that the smile on his face is answer enough. He tries to rationalize an answer ("cum is the best lube"), but again results to an explanation founded in irrational desire ("its just horny to see and feel"). Of course, the questions that Jacobs is asked are structured so that they illicit the desired response; the questions presuppose that Jacobs loves having men ejaculate inside him. The interview conveys other basic ideologies associated with Treasure Island productions. For example, Jacobs describes how he watches bareback pornography because he prefers bareback sex (i.e. the pornography he watches doesn't influence his behavior). The cumslut is the central role in bareback pornography, providing citations of a 'natural' social identity that barebackers may index both in establishing sexual identity and in accounting for sexual actions.

In barebacker blogs, it is quite common for bloggers to discuss their insatiable desire for semen. The willingness, indeed desperation to give and/or receive loads is a hallmark of barebacker self-depiction. Particularly for self-identified bottoms, the "need" for loads is a regular trope in sexblogs. The author of "Sperm my cumhole," a bareback bottom from Belfast, claims to use condoms in many situations, but says that sometimes he "just need(s) the load":

17) So, yeah, I've been playing out here in LA. I went bare once, with a boy I played with back in May. Who knows who he has been with since then. It felt right, and we went bare, no discussion. I've also gotten fucked two more times out here, both times wrapped, at my insistence, and fucked one of those boys, wrapped. As I said, I am not a total idiot, I know the risks, but also sometimes things happen, and sometimes I just need the load.

The author of "volsex," a student at the University of Tennessee, describes his (mostly) monogamous relationship with his partner, known as "Frat Boy." The desire for semen is a frequent theme in Volsex's postings, even when describing interactions within a committed relationship. For example, in a description of sex with Frat Boy, Volsex expresses the desire to have Frat Boy ejaculate into his rectum:

18) "Breed me fucker, I wanna feel your spermies in my pussy." I spit on my hand and started furiously jacking my cock, although the Frat Boy was hitting my prostate with each pump, so it wasn't going to take me long to shoot either.

The Frat Boy laughed. "Spermies? That's a new one."

I giggled "Shut up and fuck asshole."

http://volsex.blogspot.com/search/label/showers Dec 23, 2008

The desire to feel "spermies" in his "pussy" reflects the general desire for semen exchange typical of bareback erotica. The desire for semen is constructed through language that represents that desire as a natural (essentialized) sexual need, regardless of whether or not the author regularly participates in semen exchange with multiple partners.

In the posting of "Chronicles of a young slut" in which the author allows "Professor Daddy" to ejaculate inside him (described above), the moment of semen exchange is presented as a "first" time narrative. However, "young slut" describes the moment in terms of a universal desire for semen that is finally realized in this singulary event:

19) I begged for his cum in my ass while he continued to pound me. Finally, those familiar moans and shudders came and I realized that my dream was coming true; a man was actually dumping his load deep inside of me. This gave me such an incredible rush. I love feeling like a dirty whore when I'm getting fucked and getting breeded was the pinnacle of such a feeling. I

> felt like a disgusting cumdump, a cheap slut that needed constant loads squirted in his ass. And I loved it. After he finished and pulled out, I dug some cum out of my ass with my fingers and slurped it up as I jacked myself off. I was in complete ecstasy. I shot my load all over myself as my fingers were deep in my hole, playing with the cum that was freshly deposited inside.
>
> http://chroniclesofayoungslut.blogspot.com/2007/02/first-time-sort-of.html

"Young slut" imagines himself a "disgusting cumdump" that needs "constant loads" despite being rather careful in accepting loads in actual practice. Given that he claims that this is a rare (if not necessarily the first) time he has fully participated in semen exchange, "young slut" is clearly not the "cumdump" he imagines himself to be.

In these examples, barebacker identity is indexed specifically through affective stances that index a natural and insatiable desire for seminal fluid. This essentialized attraction to semen links identity as a *cumslut* with a specific affective stance (of strong desire) towards materiality of semen. In addition to its role in constructing individual barebacker identity, orientations towards seminal fluid are also used in the discourse of community among barebackers.

4.3   Seminal foundation of communal identity

Given the emphasis on semen exchange within barebacker discourse, one might assume that the pathologizing view of barebckers as irrational and unstable is valid and that the desire for semen represents some sort of "death wish." However, the emphasis on semen could also be viewed as a system of ritual exchange (Malinowski 1922) in which individuals are symbolically united through the sharing of seminal fluid. Much like a Blood Oath in which individuals mingle their blood (as between Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn), barebacker semen exchange creates both a symbolic and literal bond.

This view of semen exchange as forming bonds in a "community," is particularly common among bugchasers, who often describe the spread of HIV as a form of kinship. Bareback Jack's lexicon of bareback slang (2003b) lists *bug brother* as a term referring to fellow HIV-positive men. On a website posting "Conversion Stories" (eroticized fantasies about contracting or transmitting HIV), authors commonly refer to HIV-positive men as forming a "brotherhood."

20) Know how many of the dudes you fucked tonight were POZ? Every single one of them. So don't be so sure and sanctimonious about your Status. If you're still NEG, consider yourself fortunate. If you've succumbed, you got a precious GIFT to share with your Gay brothers. Either way, you win." "Marky"

21) Now I suck and fuck without thinking--or talking--about it. I only hope I can do for the guys I screw what my poz brothers did for me. "South Beach"

The use of "gay brothers" and "poz brothers" evoke an imagined communities in which individuals become joined to one another through their shared experiences of bareback sex and seroconversion.

Another way in which barebackers regularly evoke kinship ties is through metaphors of semen exchange as pregnancy. Because of the high replication rate of HIV, individuals may carry unique strains of the virus. Particularly in bugchasing discourse, the metaphor of pregnancy highlights the fact that the transfer of semen may result in a living entity (that is, a particular strain of HIV) has been transferred from one individual to another.

22) I sat down by the Fire Pit to contemplate their **Bug** assaulting my Innards, slipping past my body's vital defenses, into my Bloodstream, melding with my original **Virus,** transmogrifying into an ever more potent, drug-resistant **Strain.** "Slammers"

Of course, "trading strains" is only possible in sex between HIV-positive men. For HIV-negative barebackers (especially those that bottom), semen exchange is a very high-risk act that may be reserved for cases in which the individual wishes to convey an extreme level of intimacy. For example, "College Boy Sperm Hole" (a student in Washington D.C.) explains his decision to become a barebacker, "I guess I like it when a guy cums inside me. Insemination feels like a meaningful part of the connection you have with a guy".

Given the prevalent ideology of HIV prevention programs, which holds that gay men should "use a condom every time," the act of semen exchange is perhaps, the most transgressive form of gay sex. The transgressive nature of semen exchange can serve to index the expression of abjection proposed by Warner and Halperin (Halperin 2007, Warner 1995). However, it can also index social and personal relationships between gay men that serve to bolster the imagination of community that emerges from shared experiences (be they assumed or actual). The fact that semen exchange may result in the very real interpersonal connection of sharing a particular strain of HIV makes it possible to imagine a biological sameness that reinforces an essentializing view of barebackers as a distinct identity category.

5.0   Conclusion

It is clear that barebacking as a practice precedes the emergence of barebacker as an identity category. As barebacker identity has spread, sexual scripts specific to barebacker identity have emerged, centering on the exchange of semen. As part of the scripts associated with semen exchange, the participant role of *cumslut* has emerged as an identity founded upon an insatiable desire for semen. Barebackers refer back to these

"natural" scripts (and the sexual desires associated with them) as a way of accounting for their own sexual practices. The dissemination of sexual scripts provides a discursive space through which individuals can align themselves with participant roles in culturally-available sexual scripts. Within hegemonic discourses of sexual morality in general, and HIV-prevention programs among gay men in particular, the act of semen exchange is viewed as highly deviant and irrational. The sexual scripts that barebackers share with one another through the internet serve to naturalize the desire for semen exchange, normalizing the act as inevitable given a natural innate desire for semen.

Barebackers are often depicted as attracted to the transgressive nature of unsafe sex, the very embodiment of anti-normativity. However, barebacker sexual practices are themselves highly normative. The repetition of sexual scripts in barebacker sexblogs and pornography serves to ritualize specific forms of bareback sex, reinforcing normative sexual practices, providing a set of performative citations that some barebackers may refer to in conveying their sexual identity.

The discursive construction of barebacker identity involves using stance to align with the ideology of informed consent (and in opposition to the ideology of protected sex). By emphasizing epistemic and cooperative stance, barebacker discourse avoids addressing the moral imperative raised by public health discourse. Similarly, orientations towards semen as a material object serve to construct barebacker identity as involving an innate sexual desire for seminal fluid. Orientations towards semen also serve in the construction of a sense of community among barebackers by establishing metaphoric kinship relations through the exchange of bodily fluid. The role of stance in barebacker

identity illustrates the ways in which speakers employ stances towards "meta-stance objects" such as ideologies or inanimate objects.

Barebacker uses of stance create an indexical disjuncture between the different traits associated with barebacker as an identity category. The rational, responsible, open and honest individual indexed through epistemic and cooperative stance is not easily reconciled with the sexual impulsiveness associated with an insatiable desire for seminal fluid. These conflicting traits are joined in the stereotypical narrative of barebacker socialization, in which a period of research and learning results in an absence of fear that allows the narrator to give into his desire for semen. This indexical disjuncture creates a unique form of barebacker masculinity grounded in both civic responsibility and sexual compulsivity.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Red and Yellow Coming Together: Interdiscursivity and Sexual Citizenship at International Mr. Leather

1.0 Twilight's Last Gleaming

Waiting for the opening ceremonies to begin at the 29th International Mister Leather (IML) contest, I browse through the 'welcome packet' that I was given along with my tickets and T-shirt. The packet contains the predictable information about the weekend's activities and contestants, guides to gay neighborhoods in Chicago, condoms, discount coupons for a local bathhouse, and pamphlets on the effects of crystal methamphetamine,. There is also a DVD of previews advertising Treasure Island Media's bareback pornography (discussed in Chapter Six), a catalog selling sex toys and S/M equipment (such as the "Monkey Rocker Fucking Machine"), and a business card with a phone number one can call if interested in starring in a pornographic film in which men are asked to perform sexual acts under hypnosis. Like other leather contests, IML is structured like a beauty pageant, although the contestants are gay leathermen. Leatherman subculture focuses on alternative sexual practices, particularly BDSM (bondage/domination and sadism/masochism) and fetishism (see Bean 1994, Mains 1994, Rubin 1994, 197, 2000, Thomspon 1991). The IML opening ceremonies begin with representatives of different leather and/or motorcycle clubs entering the auditorium carrying banners representing their organizations. The contestants are introduced one by one, marching in behind their state or national flag as their state song (or national anthem) plays over the loudspeakers. As the master of ceremonies introduces the contestants, a bearish man in a bright red wrestling singlet translates into American Sign

Language. Most contestants are from the United States and represent specific cities, states, bars or leather clubs (including Deaf leather clubs or clubs for leathermen of color). Forty-five of the fifty-two contestants are from the United States (with three from Europe and four from Canada). Indeed, in terms of number of contestants, there are more representatives from California than there are contestants from outside of the United States. Once all of the contestants have entered, the master of ceremonies asks everyone to stand for the playing of the national anthem. The leathermen stand up, placing their hands over their hearts as the lights dim, leaving only a spotlight on the American flag. Most of the men are wearing black leather chaps with jockstraps or leather thongs so that their buttocks are exposed. From my perspective in the back of the room, the crowd's naked (mostly white, mostly pale) rear ends reflect the light intended for the flag. As *The Star Spangled Banner* begins to play, Old Glory shines above the sea of asses glowing brightly in the darkened room. How does this moment of banal nationalism (Bilig 1995) make sense at an event that is, on the surface at least, positioned in direct opposition to the hegemonic order typically associated with such displays of nationalism?

Figure 7.1: Star Spangled Banner at IML 2009

This chapter examines the language of public speeches at IML, focusing on the role of interdiscursivity in the presentation of leatherman identity. Interdiscursivity refers to the ways in which different (and sometimes competing) social discourses interact with one another. The discourse of banal nationalism conveyed through the national anthem would seem to compete with the anti-hegemonic discourse of marginality and sexual rights typically associated with leatherman subculture. In the context of the opening ceremonies of IML however, these opposing discourses are brought together in a case of indexical disjuncture that highlights the marginalized status of leather culture. The speeches by IML contestants typically juxtapose language that indexes counter-hegemonic discourses associated with sexual identity and alternative sexual practices with hegemonic discourses associated with citizenship and patriotism most typically associated with forms of social and political conservatism (that are decidedly both 'anti-leather' and anti-gay). Through the juxtaposition of these opposing discourses, the

leathermen participating in IML challenge the prevailing ideology in which opposing

public discourses limit the range of identities and stances that marginalized individuals

may assert.

Within dominant views of social-civic citizenship, 'rights' are always linked to

'responsibilities'. Bell and Binnie argue that the linking of rights and responsibilities

expresses compromise:

> Every entitlement is freighted with a duty. In our reading of sexual
> politics, rights claims articulated through appeals to citizenship carry the
> burden of compromise in particular ways; this demands the
> circumscription of 'acceptable' odes of being a sexual citizen. This is of
> course, an age-old compromise that sexual dissidents have long had to
> negotiate: the current problem is its cementing into rights-based political
> strategies, which forecloses or denies aspects of sexuality written off as
> 'unacceptable'. In particular, given the current political climate, this tends
> to demand a modality of sexual citizenship that is privatized,
> deradicalized, de-eroticized and *confined* in all sense of the word: kept in
> place, policed, limited (2003:3)

Such compromise often involves keeping sexuality out of public discourse (such as with

the U.S. military 'don't ask, don't tell' policy) or assimilating to normative forms of

public sexual identity (see Warner 1999, Weeks 1999). The discourses of banal

nationalism and public claims to citizenship have a history of being aligned with political

stances that oppose both the private sexual practices of leathermen and public displays

that index those sexual practices. Indeed, leatherfolk often experience marginalization

within lesbian and gay communities because of their refusal to confine alternative sexual

practices that cannot be easily "deradicalized" (see Mosher et al. 2006). Through the

indexical disjuncture resulting from linking discourses of citizenship with discourses of

alternative sexual practices, the leathermen at IML refuse to accept a compromise in

which their sexual identity must be confined in order to claim the rights and

responsibilities associated with citizenship. Performatively asserting an identity as 'good citizens' while publicly proclaiming participation in BDSM sexual practices challenges the assumptions governing 'acceptability' in normative ideologies of sexual citizenship. The juxtaposition of these competing discourses can be seen as a way of demarginalizing leather identity and sexual practice without resorting to forms of assimilation that might confine leather sexuality. In this chapter, I use the term nationalism fairly loosely, referring to an understanding of collectivity and solidarity within some imagined community. Participants in IML use both "leather nation" and "leather community" and although the terms have different indexical associations, no distinction between the terms is intended.

2.0   Leatherman subculture

2.1   Ideologies of leathersex

The primary motto (or mantra) in leather culture (including heterosexual and gay/lesbian leatherfolk) is "Safe, Sane and Consensual." This outlines the basic principle among practitioners of BDSM sex to never put another person into real danger or force a partner to do anything they do not wish to do. Carol Truscott outlines four primary motivations for participating in BDSM sex: "the endorphin high, the spiritual experience, the psychological benefit, and pure play." (Truscott 1991:21). The idea of "pure play" refers to simply enjoying and desiring BDSM sex. The "endorphin high" refers to the psychobiological sensation associated with the release of endorphins, chemicals produced by the pituitary gland and the hypothalamus that produce positive emotions and a sense of well-being. Endorphins may be released by extreme physical exercise, orgasm or by experiencing pain. Thus, the pain involved in S/M sex provides an opportunity to

experience (or making it possible for another person to experience) the emotional rush associated with endorphin release.

The "psychological benefit" is typically attributed to the extreme intimacy involved in BDSM sex. The interactions involved in a *scene* (a BDSM sexual interaction) are carefully negotiated between the top (or "dom" for dominant) and bottom (or "sub" for submissive) participants in the scene. Although the top has "control" over the bottom, the top does not simply do whatever s/he wants, but rather only takes the amount of control the bottom is willing to give. Tops must be aware of the bottom's limits (i.e. the amount of pain, humiliation, etc. the bottom can endure) and a "safeword" is usually chosen as a way for the bottom to let the top know if things have gone further than the bottom is willing to go (see Kulick 2003). For the bottom, one motivation for BDSM is that a scene makes it possible to relinquish responsibility (by doing only as one is told). This is sometimes cited as a motivation for individuals seeking a respite from the stress of their lives outside of BDSM (see Truscott 1991: 25). Thus, the bottom is allowed to explore a range of alternative sexual practices and an absence of responsibility with an individual who will respect the predetermined limitations the partners have agreed upon.

Many leatherfolk also describe participation in BDSM as a spiritual experience (see Bean 1991, Perry 1991, Peterson 2005, Truscott 1991, Mains 1984). For BDSM bottoms, relinquishing responsibility and the endorphin rush associated with pain may lead to the experience of a transcendental state of consciousness. In some cases, tops may also experience such states, which are often explained as resulting from the feeling of communion with their partner (see Bean 1991: 264). Leathermen may feel that the spiritual element is specific to BDSM experiences or may interpret their spiritual

experiences within the framework of some form of organized religion, typically Christianity or "New Age" forms of shamanism.

Harris (1998) argues that the discourse of psychology and New Age spirituality has been detrimental to leather culture because it undermines the radical masculine image originally associated with leathermen:

> At the very moment that leathermen had succeeded in portraying themselves as a disreputable pack of pirates and thieves, they backed away from this butch stereotype and began instead to rebut their characterization as degenerate outlaws. They attempted to rehabilitate their images in the eyes of mainstream America by accommodating themselves to its criticisms and adopting the therapeutic jargon used to condemn them setting themselves up as the very paradigm of mental health, the summit of self-actualized stability and well-being. (Harris 1997: 187)

Harris' reaction is typical of those who romaticize the Old Guard, leathermen from the era before the mid-1970s when clone culture appropriated aspects of the leatherman image. Leatherman discourse involves two competing chronotopes associated with this Old Guard and the New Guard refering to younger leathermen who do not maintain the traditions of leather culture. The Old Guard and New Guard chronotopes have much in common with broader chronotopes of "traditon" and "modernity" (e.g. Dick 2010).

2.2 Old Guard/New Guard

The era of the Old Guard began in the late 1940s among gay men returning to the U.S. after military service during World War II (see Rubin 1997, 2000). For some war veterans who first experienced homosexuality in military contexts, the prevailing "fairy" culture in which homosexuality was indexed primarily through effeminacy was particularly unappealing. After the war ended, these young gay men began forming motorcycle clubs in large urban areas, such as the Satyrs in Los Angeles and the

Warlocks in San Francisco (Rubin 1999: 254). These clubs, and the leather and biker bars that emerged with them provided a space in which homosexuality could be expressed through indexical markers of masculinity during an era when the prevailing ideology assumed that gay men were naturally feminine. Although these clubs were part of a larger trend of 1950s biker culture, many maintained highly disciplined and regulated behavior reflective of the military background of many early leathermen. Early leather culture thus juxtaposed the stance of rebellious defiance symbolized by "outlaw" motorcycle gangs with the (indexically incongruous) context of an ordered and regulatory military organization. This juxtaposition continues in the discourse of IML speeches in which nationalism and patriotism are juxtaposed with proclamations of participation in proscribe sexual practices.

As is common practice in military institutions, the rules of conduct among the Old Guard were largely unwritten and were learned through observation or informal communication. Within the Old Guard, the roles of top and bottom were quite rigid and individuals who would "switch" (i.e. were willing to be both top and bottom) were highly marginalized. The roles of "top" and "bottom" in leather culture do not necessarily refer to sexual intercourse, but rather to oppositions of dominance and submission within various forms of BDSM sexual interaction. Within this context, aspects of the leather "uniform" came to index specific participant roles in BDSM sexual scripts. It was among early leather clubs that the practice of using keys to mark identity as a top or bottom began (see Chapter One). Baldwin (1998: 110-115) outlines a number of rules associated with the Old Guard, including rules associated with how leather is worn and those related

to social and sexual interactions. Often, particular ways of dressing and specific articles of clothing indexed social and sexual relationships:

> Bottoms may not own collars unless a particular Top has allowed that bottom to be the custodian of the Top's collar. A bottom wearing a collar is a slave, and belongs to the owner of the collar who, presumably, has the keys. Other Tops are not to engage a collared bottom in conversation, but other bottoms may do so. (Baldwin 1998: 111)

Wearing a collar thus indicated that a bottom had been "claimed" as the slave of a top. Similarly, only tops could wear leather biker caps. Because the right to wear a leather cap was earned and marked rank within the club, touching another man's cap was strictly forbidden. In contrast, bottoms wore no hats or wore baseball caps and slaves never wore hats and had their heads shaved. Bottoms were expected to walk a half step behind the tops who were their partners and were not supposed to make eye contact when cruising (although they were allowed to frequently look at a top's boots). Bean (1994) notes that many men did not follow the rules and that the rules varied across clubs. However, among contemporary leathermen, the Old Guard is typically imagined in terms of this highly disciplined behavior.

Within leatherman discourse, the Old Guard is generally discussed in opposition to the New Guard, which is understood as having a more liberal view of sexual/social roles (e.g. allowing for "switching") and more openness to varied forms of leather clothing (e.g. wearing colored motorcycle leathers rather than the traditional black). As Rubin (1998) notes, this distinction has always been present within leather subculture although the division is often imagined as one between two distinct historical periods. Thus, even in early period of leatherman subculture, those men who were attracted to the outlaw image associated with 1950s biker culture and the rebellious image indexed by

BDSM sex were less involved in the highly regulated social behavior of those men who understood leather culture as a quasi-military institution.

The division between the New Guard and the Old Guard has been a regular trope within leather discourse, even though the meanings of the term have changed over time. Rubin (1998) discusses the rise of "hippie leather" in the 1960s that challenged the ideology of the Old Guard in ways similar to those identified as "New Guard" today. With the rise of masculinity-based expressions of homosexuality in the 1970s, leathermen began to become a more public presence in urban centers. Interest in leathermen rose both among gay men and the general public, particularly after the publication of Larry Townsend's widely popular *Leatherman's Handbook* in 1972. Ultimately, a number of aspects of leather culture were appropriated by clones (see Chapter One, Martin 1998) who had no serious interest in BDSM sex or fetishism. Indeed, some clones would dress in full leather without actually identifying as leathermen. The practice of wearing keys and bandanas to mark a preference for specific sexual practices (see Chapter One) that originated among leathermen began to be used by all clones. Rubin (1998) discusses an organization founded in 1980 in which members refused to wear keys to mark themselves as top or bottom. Although the use of keys began with the Old Guard, widespread clone appropriation of the symbol in the 1970s made keys ineffective as a marker of leatherman identity.

2.3 Leather culture

As leatherman subculture expanded in the late 1970s, the appropriation of symbols of leatherman identity among clones became extremely common. For example, the Village People included a leatherman among other stereotyped identities associated

with gay masculinity (see Jones and Bego 2009). However, clones were not the only ones to appropriate from leatherman culture during the 1970s. Rob Halford, the (gay) lead singer for the heavy metal band Judas Priest, celebrated leatherman culture, wearing his leather when performing and releasing the 1979 album *Hell Bent for Leather* (originally released in Britain under the title *Killing Machine*). Halford's leather look was widely appropriated until aspects of the leatherman look came to index an interest in heavy metal music independent of sexual identity.

The rise of representations of leathermen in public discourse throughout the 1970s peaked with the 1980 release of the William Friedkin film *Cruising*, which starred Al Pacino as a police officer who goes undercover among leathermen to investigate a serial killer. Because of its negative portrayal of gay culture (and particularly the display of gratuitous violence against gay men), the film was extremely controversial among gay men. Activists attempted to disrupt attempts to film in Greenwich Village (the primary gay neighborhood in New York at the time) and there were numerous protests at theaters showing the film (see Russo 259-261). Despite the film's negative portrayal of leathermen (and gay men in general), the production of a film focusing on leathermen reflects the rising public presence of leathermen during the late 1970s. In a study of leatherman subculture in the South of Market neighborhood in San Francisco, Rubin notes that during the period from 1975 to 1982, the gay male leather community experiences a "triumphant expansion" (1997: 107), but that by the mid-1980s the neighborhood and its leather community were "devastated." The impact of the AIDS crisis on leatherman subculture involved not only the great loss of life, but also involved social changes that lead to the further marginalization of sexual practices associated with

leathermen (see Rubin 1997). However, during this period leatherman contests began to thrive and expand, serving both as an opportunity to raise money for AIDS charities and as a site for political education and activism among leathermen in different cities (see Rubin 1997: 124-128).

2.4   Leather contests

Leather contests began as local competitions to promote various leather bars or publications. The first IML was organized by Chuck Renslow and his partner Dom Orejudos, then owners of the Gold Coast Bar, the main leather bar in Chicago. Renslow and Orejudos invited leather bars around the world to send contestants and used the competition to promote business at local Chicago bars (Renslow 2004). The first IML had twelve contestants, all from the United States, and around 400 total participants (compared to more than 20,000 in 2007). Today there are numerous leather contests for men and women, as well as competitions among bootblacks. There are two basic types of leather contests (see Baldwin 1993:17). In contests that follow the IML model, judging is based on community involvement and self-presentation in interviews and speeches. There are also leather contests similar to Mr. Drummer International, in which contestants are also judged on the basis of an original BDSM scene that must be performed as part of the competition. Although Mr. Drummer International is no longer held, similar types of leather contests remain, such as International LeatherSIR and International Leatherboy. The winner of Mr. Drummer was held up as an erotic role model and had to agree to appear in an erotic photospread in *Drummer* magazine (Baldwin 1993:18). Thus, the contest was a direct promotion for the magazine. In contrast, the winner of IML is

intended to be a community leader that focuses on politics and public representations of leathermen.

During the mid-1980s, leather contests spread widely as they became central to political activism and organization in response to the AIDS crisis (see Rubin 1997). It was during this period that the titles such as International Mr. Leather became highly politicized. Although the dedication of individual titleholders to political activism varied from year to year, titleholders are generally seen as political leaders and spokesmen for the leather community. Although some leathermen view the contests as just another type of beauty pageant, the contests have made some important contributions to the leather community. Rubin notes:

> Title contests and events to which titleholders lend their glamour have raised fabulous sums of money for various community projects. The title system provides an easy way to communicate quickly new community priorities or to mobilize energy for other worthy goals, such as the preservation of leather history or support for important court cases bearing on the legality of SM sex or leather erotica.
> The title system has also helped facilitate a growing integration of the leather communities on a national and international level. It has been one of the mechanisms of the dissemination of political information throughout leather populations. (1997:127-8).

Although titleholders are still seen as political figures and potential leaders within the leather community, there are no specific responsibilities associated with the winner of IML. There are no contractual obligations for Mr. IML and the winner is free to use his "reign" however he chooses. The political and social concerns of IML contestants are thus critical to the judging process, and many contestants discuss their "platforms" (similar to those of Miss America contestants) to give judges a clear idea of how they would spend their year as Mr. IML. The language in public speeches by IML contestants

generally reflect the view of titleholders as political leaders and most contestants attempt to convey an identity marked by references to political involvement and public service.

Like many beauty contests, the discourse at IML runs thick with ideologies of community (or nationhood). Because IML is the largest international gathering for leathermen, symbols associated with the ideology of community are typically introduced during IML weekend. Indeed, the two most predictable symbols of nationalism, a flag and a national anthem, were both introduced at IML (although in different years). The flag of the Leather Nation was introduced at IML in 1989. The flag has nine stripes; the top and bottom stripe are black, with alternating black and blue stripes above and below a central white stripe. The upper right-hand corner has a large read heart. The "leather pride" flag has since come into widespread use both in public events (such as Gay Pride parades) and in numerous consumer products such as clothing and accessories (particularly flag pins attached to leather vests).

Figure 7.2: Leather Pride Flag

The Leather Anthem, *One common heartbeat* (Aldrich and Tyrrell 1998), was debuted at IML 20. The lyrics are similar to other national anthems (see Bilig 1995: 86), in emphasizing a sense of unity and shared identity:

1) One common heartbeat
   One leather nation

> We're growing stronger day by day,
> Brothers and sisters
> Our destination
> Is just a heartbeat away. (Aldrich and Tyrell 1998)

The anthem and flag serve to index an imagined leather nation with unified political goals. However, the politicization of leather contests is not without controversy. The promotion of a "Leather Nation" in many leather contests is certainly met with skepticism and even disdain by some leathermen who view the contests as insincere posturing that isn't true to the spirit of leather culture. For example, author John Preston has argued that the emergence of identity politics into leatherman discourse was largely responsible for the widespread appropriation of leatherman "style" by gay men with no interest in BDSM sex. Preston presents the speeches at a leatherman contest as representative of the identity politics that he sees as detrimental to leatherman identity:

> I listened to the speakers who interrupted the parade of handsome men on stage. They were talking about the "leather brotherhood." They talked about teaching people about the "good" aspects of the "leather life-style." They wanted acknowledgment from the general society that they were constructive members who were simply finding an "alternative way to love."
>
> And I thought: *Give me a break!* (Preston1991:211)

Preston notes that his problem with the contest was the intrusion of politics into "a sexual space, a private space, even a ritualized holy space." (1991: 211) For Preston, the promotion of an imagined leatherman community or leathern nation is in direct conflict with the marginalized position of leathermen as sexual outlaws. Making an identity founded on alternative sexual practice public and political desexualizes leatherman identity. Preston holds that the absence of BDSM sexuality in such nationalistic discourse also makes leatherman identity attractive to men who are not interested in BDSM sex,

further disrupting the indexical link between leatherman identity and BDSM sexual interactions.

2.3   International Mr. Leather

The IML contest includes a preliminary and final competition. The preliminary scores are based on private interviews between judges and contestants (sixty percent of the preliminary score) and the "Pecs and Personality" competition (accounting for the remaining 40 percent). The Pecs and Personality competition is open to the public and occurs on the Saturday night of IML weekend. Although early IML contests had a bathing suit competition (in which competitors wore Speedos), the contestants in current competitions usually wear leather jockstraps when they are judged on physical appearance. In the Pecs and Personality competition, contestants appear in leather and are each asked a single question based on their answers to a contestant questionnaire. The preliminary scores are used to determine the twenty IML finalists who compete on Sunday afternoon.

Figure 7.3: IML 2007 Contestants

Once the twenty finalists have been chosen, preliminary scores are thrown out and a new round of scoring begins. The IML final competition consists of two parts, the "Physical Image" section and a speech by each finalist. In the Physical Image competition, contestants simply appear on stage in a revealing leather outfit (e.g. a leather thong and harness). Physical appearance accounts for 20 percent of the final score. Contestants are also judged on "Leather Image" and "Presentation Skills" on the basis of their appearance and performance during their speech. Each of these accounts for forty percent of the final score. Although the contestants are certainly judged on the basis of masculinity, it is also important that performative masculinity appears to be a 'natural' part of the contestant's everyday presentation of the self (and not an exaggerated "hypermasculinity"). The performance must also be consistent; a contestant who appears outwardly masculine but speaks in a way that might be associated with effeminacy is at a clear disadvantage. In his guide for participants in leather contests, Guy Baldwin (International Mr. Leather 1989) discusses the importance of "gender-appropriate" behavior:

> Judges want you to look and move in a gender-appropriate way, whatever that means to you. Be aware that they don't necessarily want you to be a caricature – like a Bluto or some stiff Macho Man or Queen of the Amazons. In a men's contest, judges may penalize you for behavior that is too delicate or feminine for most men's taste. It doesn't mean that you aren't a man – it means you aren't their man. The issues here are a bit different for women in leather contests because the women's community is more tolerant of variation than is the men's community (Baldwin 2004: 75).

Although expressions of masculinity are certainly open to variation ("whatever that means to you"), contestants are expected to adhere to normative understandings of masculinity among gay men ("most men's taste").

For their presentations, Mr. IML contestants do not have to formally declare any platform, but may speak about whatever they chose. They are free to stick to a chosen platform or to not have any set platform at all. In his "step down" speech (given before handing the title of International Mr. Leather onto the next year's winner), Bo Ladashevska (IML 2006), summarized his decision on the question of a platform as follows:

> Issues important to one community may not be relevant to another, so I decided at the outset not to choose a single platform. Instead, before visiting a community, I tried to research which issues were important to them, then tailored a message that I hoped would be relevant and empowering to them.

If a contestant decides to propose a platform, they may present it in their speech during the final competition. However, they are not obligated to do so. The only rule is that the speech must not be longer than ninety seconds. The speeches are timed and if the contestant is still speaking ninety seconds after their first word, the microphone is cut off. Although the speeches are carefully planned and practiced to meet this requirement, two of the 2007 finalists had the microphone cut off before they finished speaking.

Given the centrality of boots to the expression of leatherman identity (e.g. Townsend 2000:88-9), leather contests often include a separate contest among bootblacks. At IML, contestants for International Mr. Bootblack compete by polishing boots (and other articles of leather clothing). Ballots for International Mr. Bootblack are given to everyone purchasing tickets to IML events. During the hours when the vendors' area is open, contestants polish in exchange for votes from IML participants. The winner of the bootblack competition is introduced during the final IML competition.

Although the contest itself is the central focus of IML weekend, the importance of the event extends far beyond the selection of the next titleholder. Despite estimates of between 20,000 and 30,000 participants in IML weekend 2007, the majority of attendees do not actually attend the events associated with the contest itself. Indeed, for the final competition, many of the seats in the Chicago Theater remained empty. Many of the men attending IML weekend are primarily interested in the social (and sexual) environment created by having such a large number of leathermen together in one place. The celebration of leatherman subculture at IML weekend thus involves a great deal more than the contest itself.

2.4   IML weekend

The Palmer House Hilton hotel in Chicago was originally built in 1871 as a wedding gift for Berta Honoré from her husband, Potter Palmer. Berta Palmer rose to the top of Chicago high society, even serving as president of the Board of Lady Managers for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Although the hotel burned down in the Great Chicago Fire (only thirteen days after opening), it was rebuilt and has been refurbished several times in attempts to maintain the aristocratic opulence of its origins. From 2001 to 2007, the Palmer House served as home to IML (in 2008, the contest moved to the larger flagship Hilton on Michigan Avenue).

There are numerous events throughout the weekend, many aimed specifically at men with particular sexual fetishes. On Saturday night, as the preliminary Pecs and Personality competition is beginning, one of the larger ballrooms of the Palmer House is home to the "Kennel Club," a special event for those men involved in "pup play," in which men pretend to be dogs. The pups often run in packs, wearing leather masks

formed to look like dogs, sometimes lead by their masters on leashes. Although most

wear the typical leather "uniform" of harnesses, chaps and leather jockstraps, others are

dressed in American football uniforms (complete with helmets and shoulder pads) or

wrestling singlets, often with a hole cut out of the back for the pup's tail. Many of the

pups have some sort of leather or plastic "tail" that protrudes from their anus, held in

place by large butt plugs. All of the pups wear knee pads enabling them to crawl on all

fours (although they typically walk upright outside of the kennel context). The erotic

pleasure of being a pup is said to arise from the total absence of self-control and the

freedom from having to conform to the norms of human behavior. According to Michael

Daniels' *Woof: Perspectives into the erotic care and training of the human dog*, the

pleasure for the "human dog" comes from "being in a comfortable protected headspace at

the foot of a caring, controlling Master." (Daniels 2003: 17). The master-pup relationship

recasts sexual scripts based on domination (like master-slave relationships) into a context

in which the domination need not involve humiliation of the "sub" (submissive partner).

Indeed, the closeness between master and pup is primarily an emotional bond and pup

play need not involve any sexual contact whatsoever.

As I arrive at the kennel event, the organizers are carrying away a plastic kiddy

swimming pool and an oversized plastic fire hydrant. Sad that I have missed what must

have been an impressive attempt at realistic canine behavior, I watch the pups run and

play, sniffing each others rear ends, panting and begging their masters for treats (usually

animal crackers), and playing with rubber squeaky toys. As I stand in this extravagant

ballroom, watching the pups sit and roll over, wagging their tails hoping to earn treats

from their masters, I cannot help but think that several miles to the north, in her grave in Chicago's Graceland cemetery, Berta Honoré Palmer is probably rolling over as well.

Because of events like the Kennel Club, along with various other forms of sadomasochism, bondage and domination, leathermen (and leather contests) have long been the poster children of anti-gay hate group propaganda concerning the dangerous 'pathology' of gay culture. Mr. International Leather is a particular favorite topic on the website of *Americans for Truth about Homosexuality*, an organization claiming to be "devoted exclusively to exposing and countering the homosexual activist agenda," but classified as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. The president of *American for Truth about Homosexuality*, Peter LaBarbera gives an annual report on IML weekend (or "Sodom by the Lake" as LaBarbera calls it). LaBarbera attends IML every single year (perhaps to ensure that Satan hasn't changed the game plan) and posts pictures from the event on his website, asking readers to complain to the Hilton corporation for being "associated with the sadistic sexual perversion-fest known as International Mr. Leather" and to ask "how they sterilize their rooms after the perverse IML orgies." (LaBarbera 2007) Yet pup play is not a uniquely "gay" phenomenon, although among heterosexuals the practice is more commonly realized as "pony" play, in which women pretend to be horses (see Gates 2000). Indeed, virtually all of the forms of "kinky sex" at IML also occur among lesbians, bisexuals and heterosexuals so that LaBarbera's "truth" is in not necessarily even "about homosexuality".

There are a number of distinct factions among those participating in IML weekend. Although the majority of those attending IML do not publicly present themselves as belonging to any specific sub-group among leathermen, several subgroups

have a highly visible presence. The pups are one of the most vocal and highly-visible, perhaps because they tend to run in packs. One pack of pups known as the "Ruff Riders" regularly runs through the hotel, barking and howling as the run (on their hind legs) wearing matching football uniforms (altered to account for tails). One of the IML contestants (Mr. Gulf Coast Florida) publicly identifies as a pup, going by his pup name, Trooper, and wearing a tail for the "Pecs and Personality" competition.

In addition to pups, the two most visible subgroups at IML are the fisters and the watersports aficionados. The practice of *fisting* involves insertng one's hand (and often part of one's forearm) in the anus of a sexual partner. This, of course, requires time and precision in order to relax and stretch the anal sphincter to the point at which a hand can actually fit inside. Fisting gained popularity in the 1960s, with fisters quickly forming a subgroup within leather culture (see Rubin 1999). By the 1970s leather sex clubs began to hang buckets beside leather slings in order to hold the cans of Crisco vegetable shortening that were the favored lubricant among fisters at the time. Watersports (or golden showers) is a fetish for urine, typically involving one sexual partner urinating on another (or both urinating on one another).

Both the fisters and the watersports fans tend to mark themselves publicly through the hanky code. As discussed in chapter one, the hanky code involved specific colors of bandanas that corresponded to specific sexual acts. Wearing the bandana in the right pocket marked the "bottom" or "sub," while the left side signified "top" or "dom." In the hanky code, red and yellow represent fisting (red) and watersports (yellow). The color dark blue, which represents anal intercourse in the hanky code, is also used in this way. Although most leathermen no longer wear the bandanas, many wear black leather

clothing with red, yellow or blue accents to mark association with specific sexual practices. A number of vendors at IML sell leather pants with a colored stripe, leather jockstraps with a colored strip down the center and black harnesses with a colored accent stripe. Other vendors sell household goods in red and yellow, such as china, pillows and bed sheets. The act of wearing one of the bandana colors from the hanky code is called *flagging.* Although men who flag red and yellow are relatively common at IML, men who flag blue with bandanas are extremely rare (blue as a trim color for black leather clothing is more common). This is not surprising given the relatively "unmarked" character of anal intercourse as a sexual script among gay men. That is, it can be assumed that most of the gay men at IML might be open to anal intercourse while smaller subsets of men might participate in fisting or watersports. Flagging thus marks participation in this smaller sexual market, facilitating identification of potential sexual partners while showing community solidarity.

There are, of course, other subgroups among the men at IML, such as those with fetishes for sports gear or medical equipment. However, the pups, fisters, and watersportsmen are by far the three most visible groups. In addition to divisions based solely on sexual practice, there is the generational division between the Old Guard and the New Guard discussed above. The diversity of sexual identities at IML is not particularly surprising, given that the number of attendees is so high. The participants at IML 29 filled up the Palmer House Hilton and most of the flagship Hilton a few blocks to the south. Throughout IML weekend, the doors of the Palmer House are watched by security guards and signs are posted at every entrance to prevent random tourists from wandering into the world of leathermen:

2) Due to the entire hotel being reserved for a private convention, all hotel facilities are closed to the general public until Tuesday, May 29th. Thank you for your cooperation. The Palmer House Hilton.

This does not mean that the general public cannot enter the hotel, as public passes to the vendors' displays are available in exchange for a small ($4) donation to the Leather Archives & Museum, the "national archives" for leather culture (also in Chicago), which maintains collections of documents and media related to leather history as well as historical examples of S/M equipment and sex toys.

The vendor area, or "leathermart," at IML includes four large ballrooms on separate floors of the hotel with over a hundred vendors. Some of the booths are intended to promote other leather events, websites, bathhouses, or clubs. Others promote HIV prevention or anti-drug campaigns. Most, however, are selling items marketed to leathermen, including leather clothing, jewelry, pornography, equipment for BDSM scenes, and sex toys. The sheer number and diversity of items available is overwhelming. The crowd includes a wide range of fetishists, including gay skinheads, men in rubber and latex, men wearing diapers and men dressed in police and military uniforms. In one booth, a young man in nothing but a jock strap is dancing in front of a giant television screen showing a pornographic film in which the same young man is being fisted. There are a number of such large screens promoting various types of pornography, including watersports, fisting, leather and barebacking pornography in addition to more "mainstream" gay porn. There are appearances by drag queen porn producer Chichi La Rue with actors from her ("safe sex is hot sex") films as well as actors from Treasure Island Media and Dick Wadd media, major bareback pornographer companies. There is a booth overflowing with medical equipment showing video demonstrations of urethra play

(in which progressively larger metal rods are inserted into a man's urethra). There are "rimming chairs" specifically designed for anilingus (basically toilet seats with short legs attached so that the chair can fit over one's face as s/he lies on the floor). Muscular men wearing only towels are passing out condoms and discount coupons for a Chicago bathhouse. There seems to be an infinite variety of leather slings, various forms of metal dungeon equipment, used athletic uniforms, electric stimulation devices, restraining devices, gags, and an endless array of S/M equipment including paddles, canes, whips, chains and so forth. Fort Troff, a leather/BDSM shop in Atlanta has a poppers testing counter where customers can compare brands. [NOTE: Poppers are alkyl nitrates that are used as inhalants (usually sold as "VCR head cleaner" or room deodorizer). Although alkyl nitrates have been used since the 19th century as "vapors" to treat a range of illnesses, they are also used among some gay men to enhance sexual experiences. Poppers increase blood flow and cause certain muscles to relax. The ability of poppers to relax anal sphincter muscles makes it particularly popular among fisters.] A company selling rubber sheets is allowing customers to return the sheets they have purchased on Monday afternoon to be shipped to their address so that one can use the sheets during IML weekend without having to pack the sheets for the trip home. By Saturday afternoon, the rubber sheets are sold out. At one point, I turn around to see a man in fireman's boots, a leather jockstrap and a white turban rolling on the floor with a man in a pink rabbit suit. For visitors who come to IML solely to experience the leathermart as sexual spectacle (such as Mr. LaBarbera of *American for truth about homosexuality*), the sign marking the Palmer House as a "private" event only enhances the exoticism involved.

Figure 7.4: Outside the Palmer House Hilton, IML 2007

As the hotel is entirely filled with leathermen, the lobby of the Palmer House becomes a giant leather bar for the duration of the weekend. There are several bars set up in the lobby, serving beer continuously throughout IML. For much of the weekend, the lobby is wall-to-wall leathermen. In addition to the lobby bar, there are organized parties in hotel ballrooms and various play parties throughout the hotel. Some guests post signs in the vendor area advertising parties geared towards specific interests (e.g. "Spanking party tonight at 10 p.m. Room 12360"). Some of the hotel rooms are used for filming pornography (and indeed, some of the actors are recruited from the lobby). At one point during IML 2008, filming for a Treasure Island Media bareback gangbang film caused concern because men were lined up to participate in the hallway, keeping the door open so that hotel housekeepers could not help but see what was happening (Reed 2008). Although celebrating open expressions of sexuality, IML organizers repeatedly remind participants not to have sex in the public areas of the hotel because it is upsetting for the

hotel staff. There are also regular reminders about a Chicago law prohibiting exposed buttocks before 10 p.m. This is particularly important for men wearing jockstraps who go out on the street to smoke. At the "Pecs and Personality" competition, for example, the Master of Ceremonies, Brad Balof, stressed the importance of ass coverage when walking between the Palmer House and the Chicago Theater for the final competition:

3) 1   they also appreciate that you have been covering your asses before 10 pm
     2   they certainly do appreciate that
     3   and I remind everyone who's coming to the historic Chicago theater tomorrow afternoon,
     4   uh (.) that you will be walking in a public space
     5   for about four an a half blocks
     6   so (.) take a towel if you're going to take your chaps
     7   um (.) but the cushions are a little old at the Chicago theater,
     8   so I would just recommend other pants (.) just make it easy on yourself
     9   unless you're into that (.) and that's fine too

The sheer number of leathermen in and around the hotel leads to a feeling of public acceptance that one could easily take something like a bare bottom as nothing out of the ordinary. However, this acceptance does not necessarily extend beyond the confines of the hotel, where bare buttocks might indeed be more of a shock for passersby. The organizers of IML thus provide shuttle service throughout the weekend going from the Palmer House to the Chicago Hilton and to leatherbars in and around Boystown, the main gay neighborhood in Chicago. The range of accepted behaviors at IML extends beyond alternative sexual practices. There are meetings for leathermen in recovery held twice a day, so that IML will be a "safe" environment for leathermen in various twelve-step programs. There is a special independent event for leather bears held at a nearby hotel. There is also a Sunday morning leather church service for Christian leathermen and various informative sessions about leather culture and BDSM practices.

The diversity of events at IML makes it possible for the event to provide very different experiences and have different personal meaning for each individual participant. For many IML, the attraction of the event is not the contest itself, but the social environment and sexual marketplace that emerges from the congregation of so many leathermen and curious gay tourists all in one place. For those involved directly with the contest, including members of the leather clubs who have sponsored contestants and leaders in various leather social and political organization, IML is framed as being primarily about community and political unity.

Because the hotel is a fairly closed environment marked by extreme openness towards various forms of sexual expression, it is easy to lose sight of the world outside. Given the continual flow of men in leather, athletic uniforms, police uniforms, diapers, rubber, latex, underwear and so forth, military uniforms are not that unusual. On the first day of IML, it seemed like every other outfit was worthy of comment. After a couple of days, my friend Andrew tells me that he has decided that most men look better in opaque latex (as opposed to transparent latex, which tends to produce a packaged bratwurst look). Everything seems to become just another fetish. Indeed, in his announcement about not having sex in public parts of the hotel, Brad Balof jokes about heterosexuality being a fetish (lines 5-6 below). In an attempt to lighten the negativity of the "no sex in public" policy, Balof begins by telling of how he startled the hotel staff by rushing down the hall of the hotel, stopping to put his ear to each door to find the source of sounds of sexual activity. Upon finding the right room, he claims to have cheered the couple on through the door:

4) 1 that's it, that's right, yea, give it to him, give it to him
   2   but, uh, the hotel staff would like to let me,

3   to let you know that (.) you cannot give it to him in the lobby
4   (laughter) you cannot give it to him in the bathrooms
5   you cannot give it to him in any of the public place
6   or her (.) whatever (.) you know, your fetishes are (.) um,
7   that's funny that I consider being straight a fetish
8   ironic (laughter) um,
9   whatever the case may be, don't do it in public places,
10   find a hotel room and if you're not staying at the hotel room,
11   and you're desperate for a place to get it on,
12   let me know (.) ten-two-fifty, I'll help you out, OK?

In the first five lines of this segment, Balof uses the phrase "give it to him" six different times before pausing and adding "or her," almost as if he is correcting sexist usage. Within the context of IML weekend, where thousands of gay men have gather together and women are few and far between, heterosexual sex would indeed be unexpected and surprising. The idea that being straight could be considered a 'fetish' in this context demonstrates that despite being highly marginalized in a broader social context, the social and sexual interactions at IML are themselves highly normative.

3.0   Citizenship and leatherman identity at IML

3.1   Indexical disjuncture and self-categorization

One form of indexical disjuncture in the self-presentation of IML contestants is the act of asserting membership in multiple identity categories that do not necessarily align within normative assumptions about the structure of social categorization. That is, the attributes generally associated with members of one category are not typically associated with an opposing category (within essentialist views of identity categories as monolithic and static). For example, in his speech during the IML finals, Brian "Captain" McCoy (Mr. Pittsburgh Leather) opens by introducing himself through combinations of categories that challenge hegemonic assumptions about identity categories:

5) 1   I'm often asked what it's like to be a gay disabled adoptive father
    2   and a leatherman all at the same time.
    3   As a father, I use what I know to lead and teach my kids
    4   and as a one-legged man I wear boots
    6   because my doctors told me I couldn't.

By asserting his identity as both a gay man and an adoptive father, McCoy challenges

hegemonic assumptions (and in some states, legal prohibitions) in which gay men and

adoptive fathers are understood as mutually-exclusive categories. Similarly, asserting

identity as disabled and as a leatherman challenges assumptions about the potential

ability of a "one-legged man" to participate in even the most basic practices that index

leatherman identity (wearing boots). In noting that he wears boots precisely because his

doctors told him he couldn't, McCoy indexes a defiant affective stance that is a hallmark

of leatherman identity. Of course, this stance also validates the centrality of leather

culture to McCoy's identity by asserting that no obstacle (even having only one foot) is

great enough to prevent him from indexing his leatherman identity by wearing boots.

Similarly, Bill Howard (Mr. Kentucky Leather) opens his finalist speech with a

series of identity categories in which he proudly claims membership:

6) 1   I'm proud to be an American,
    2   and I'm proud to be an ex-marine.
    3   I'm proud to work in the thoroughbred industry of Kentucky,
    4   and I'm proud to be a leatherman.

The first line in this example (*I'm proud to be an American*) is identical to the chorus of

Lee Greenwood's (1984) country music song *God bless the USA*:

7)   And I'm proud to be an American,
      where at least I know I'm free.
      And I won't forget the men who died,
      who gave that right to me.

      And I gladly stand up,
      next to you and defend her still today.

> Cause there ain't no doubt I love this land,
> God bless the USA.

After Greenwood performed the song at the 1984 Republican National Convention, *God bless the USA* has become a staple of Repbulican conservative political campaigns. The song experienced a second round of popularity after the attacks of September 11, 2001, when it reached 16 on the Billboard Top 100 charts. By quoting a familiar song that is indexically associated with conservative forms of banal nationalism, Howard aligns himself with ideologies of citizenship that typically marginalize gay men (particularly leathermen). The second self-categorization (ex-marine) reinforces this alignment with conservative ideologies of the prototypical patriotic citizen while the third (worker in the thoroughbred industry) indexes the working class, rural identity associated with "real" Americans with conservative and traditional values. The fourth self-categorization (leatherman) is aligned with the prior three through the use of the same frame (*I'm proud to ___*). While the first three index a conservative traditional and patriotic identity, the unmarked inclusion of the fourth suggests that the leathermen belong in the imagined community of patriotic conservative citizens.

The juxtaposition of markers of seemingly opposing identities works to challenge normative assumptions about the sorts of social attributes associated with specific identity categories, particularly that of leatherman identity. This form of indexical disjuncture creates an analogous relationship between the attributes associated with seemingly opposing categories (such as father/leatherman or Republican/leatherman). The rhetorical linking between leatherman identity and identity categories that are viewed positively in hegemonic public discourse realigns the indexical associations of both

identity categories, allowing contestants to index a stance as "good" patriotic citizens without denying or negating their identity as leathermen.

Indexical disjunctures are also a regular part of contestant introductions during the Pecs and Personality portion of the IML competition. Contestants are introduced with a standard set of information about physical appearance, profession, hobbies, and interests. This information is taken directly from questionnaires that contestants fill out before the competition. The form of these introductions is like those of most beauty pageants, in which contestant introductions typically have the tripartite structure of physical attributes followed by professional or educational information and closing with some form of personal interests or aspirations. For example, in the Miss USA pageant, information about finalists is displayed in three parts: age/height, college affiliation and interests. Interests for Miss USA contestants are similar to the non-BDSM information given for IML contestants (e.g. horseback riding, volleyball, reading). For example, here is the introduction for Hoeppner:

8) 1   Contestant number twenty two, Bill Hoeppner.
    2   Mr. Ramrod 2006
    3   sponsored by the Ramrod Bar in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.
    4   Bill stands at 5 foot 11 inches high.
    5   He weighs 185 pounds.
    6   He has brown hair and brown eyes.
    7   He's a buyer for furniture retail and lives in Miami Beach, Florida.
    8   Some of his hobbies and interests include bondage,
    9   nipple play and stunt kite-flying.

For the majority of contestants, the "hobbies and interests" section of the introduction demonstrates indexical disjuncture. In the example above, the disjuncture results from the juxtaposition of bondage and nipple play with stunt kite-flying. The juxtaposition of BDSM interests specific to leatherman identity and general interests unassociated with

sexuality occurs in the introduction of virtually every contestant. For example, the hobbies for Mr. Detroit Leather are "Broadway musicals, gastronomy, bilbliophilia, edging, and milking" (edging is the practice of repeatedly purposely stopping contact just before ejaculation in order to delay orgasm; milking is the act of causing a man to ejaculate by stimulating the prostate with one's fingers). Similarly, Mr. Ottawa Leather's introduction strings together several disjointed "hobbies and skills":

9) 1   His hobbies and skills include leather and bondage,
   2   opera music, raising awareness for the Special Olympics
   3   and he is a strong supporter of North American natives and the Metis people.

These juxtapositions serve to assert a unique and individual identity; few people would claim interest in bondage, the Special Olympics *and* the Metis people.

One basic effect of the introductions at IML is to "queer" the heteronormative institution of beauty pageants by injecting supermasculine gay sexuality into an institution usually associated with highly normative forms of heterosexual femininity. In joining BDSM interests with comparatively mundane hobbies like baking or rock climbing, IML contestants simultaneously index identities in both public discourse and the counterpublic discourse of leathermen. The parallel presentation of public and counterpublic hobbies and interests positions counterpublic leather practices as equivalent to everyday hobbies that are not seen as unusual. Because the interests are associated with a single individual, they form an indexical analogy in which the social attributes indexed by an interest in mountain biking (for example) are aligned with those attributes indexed by practicing bondage. The adequation (Bucholtz and Hall 2004) between the identities indexed by both types of "hobbies" serves to rhetorically legitimize

(and de-marginalize) BDSM practices; they are no different than other positively-valued activities associated with cooking or exercising.

3.2 Pecs and personality

The Pecs and Personality portion of the preliminary competition occurs on Saturday night of IML weekend. All of the contestants participate, appearing in full leather for a short interview with the Master of Ceremonies. The questions for the interview are drawn from contestant questionnaires and usually focus on the response to a question about interests and hobbies. By far the most common question is one that combines two of the constants interests, typically combining a BDSM interest with a non-BDSM interest, reinforcing the indexical disjuncture found in the contestant introductions. The questions are designed to provide the contestant with an opportunity to demonstrate wit and creativity. For example, one contestant who writes erotic fiction is asked to outline a story about a dungeon scene with the officer who had him discharged from the army for being gay. The questions are intended to be humorous and revolve around sexuality (in contrast to the speech during the finals, which are much more likely to focus on political and social issues). Many of the questions provide fairly obvious openings for sexual innuendo, offering the contestants a chance to demonstrate (perhaps minimal) skills in camp sexual repartee. The questions may even provide the first part of a potential camp adjacency pair, allowing the contestant to fill in the sexual reading in his response. Mr. Mid-States Leather, Brian Mincey of Cincinnati, is asked a question linking experience as a baker with BDSM:

```
10)  1 MC:       Now Brian, how would you say the following skills
     2            that you've honed as a "Master Baker" fit into Dungeon Play?
     3            I'll give it to you one at a time.
     4            Kneading the dough.
```

> 5 Brian: Well, if you do it right you don't have any problem getting it to
> rise.
> 6   (cheers and laughter)
> 7 MC: Icing the cake.
> 8 Brian: It's fun to lick.
> 9   (cheers and laughter)
> 10 MC: Folding the batter.
> 11 Brian: That can hurt.
>   (cheers and laughter)
> 12 MC: Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Mid-States Leather, Brian Mincey!

Here, the question is simply a series of three adjacency pairs in which an opening

involving baking terminology (lines 4, 6, and 10) require a sexual joke in response (lines

5, 8, and 11). Each response brings cheers and laughter from the audience.

The interview forces contestants to demonstrate skill in sexual humor, although

the questions vary in terms of how much they help provide an opening. Dan Beach, Mr.

Minneapolis Eagle, is asked a fairly open-ended question about a date with a science

fiction action hero:

11)

> 1 MC: Now Dan, you've told us that you're into sci-fi action movies.
> 2   Now, apart from watching Ben Browder in full leather from *Farscape*
> 3   and now *Stargate: Atlantis* fame.
> 4   (crowd cheers).
> 5   A favorite among many, I hear.
> 6   What other single action hero do you crave,
> 7   and what would your first date be like?
> (6 second pause)
> 8 Dan: The first action figure I can remember is Arnold Schwarzenegger
> 9   uh (.) dress him up and--
> 10   (yelling and booing from audience)
> 11 Dan: (response to audience member) yea, I know
> 12   (laughter)
> 13   maybe with a ball gag.
> 14   (cheers and applause from audience)
> 15 MC: And what would you do on your first date?
> 15 Dan: Not watch any of his movies. (laughter)
> 16   Dinner. Home. A little bondage. (.) uh (.) and (.) that's about it.

17 MC: As long as you don't take the ball gag out, I'll be a third wheel.

After being asked the question (lines 1-7), Beach pauses for six seconds before

answering. Beach does not present Schwarzenegger as a hero he "craves," but rather says

that Schwarzenegger is the first he can remember (line 8). [NOTE: This may be due to

the association between the phrase "action hero" and Schwarzenegger's film *Last Action*

Hero]. Schwarzenegger's status as a Republican politician makes him an odd choice as

the object of gay sexual desire. Given that Schwarzenegger vetoed a 2005 bill legalizing

gay marriage, he certainly doesn't cut it as a gay "dream date." Beach acknowledges the

mistake in line 11 and shifts to a stance denigrating Schwarzenegger. In line 13, he

suggests that Scharzenegger could wear a ball gag (making it impossible for him to

speak) and in line 15 he pokes fun at Schwarzenegger's acting abilities. Beach's shift in

stance serves to repair the situation and brings cheers from the audience.

Although most of the questions offer clear opportunities for sexual innuendo,

many of the contestants answer them as if they were sincere in intention and literal in

meaning. Mr. Eagle NYC, Rick Weber, enjoys bicycling and teaches a spin class, so

naturally, his question combines bicycling with BDSM.

12)

1 MC: Now Rick (.) we noticed that you got real (H*) cute on you application
2   and you put (H) (.)
3   listed as one of your hobbies
4   "putting something hard between your legs and riding it."
5   Now, inquiring minds want to know,
6   just how the interest became a hobby
7   and how it translates into a skill once you enter the dungeon.
8 Rick: (laughs) Um (.) well, on the bicycle there's a lot of lube.
9   So you can start with the lube.
10   Practice makes perfect and you just carry it right on in.
11 MC: And that takes you into the dungeon?
12 Rick: Completely.

13 MC: Riding long and hard.
14 Rick: Well, then you've got the inner tube
15   which can be, you know, bondage,
16   or tie someone up
17   or use it as a gag

Weber has used sexual innuendo in filling out the contestant questionnaire and his sexual humor is the basis for the question (lines 1-7). However, his answer aligns with the literal reading of the question, that is, "How *would* one use a bicycle in a dungeon scene?" He begins his answer with noting that the bicycle can be a source of lube (lines 8-10). Although the Master of Ceremonies attempts to return to the "riding" metaphor linking bicycles with sex (line 13), Weber continues the literal reading with a list of ways in which the inner tube from the bicycle could be used for bondage (lines 15-17). The M.C. plays an important role in production of camp banter, both by providing contestants with openings to encourage sexual innuendo (as in line 11 above) and by making his own sexual jokes (as in line 13 above).

Some questions provide little help in facilitating the production of sexual humor. For example, some contestants are given multiple choice questions that are themselves intended to be humorous, forcing the contestant to extend a joke already included in the question. In such cases, the MC may introduce further questions that offer additional opportunities for humor. For example, Mr. Kentucky Leather Bill Howard was given a multiple choice question

13)

1 MC: Now Bill, as a trainer owner and racer of thoroughbreds,
2   you must have an intimate knowledge of horses.
3   Now, which term best describes the last person that you had a "Triple Crown"
4   night with and why?
5   Were they a (.) a mustang, b (.) a donkey, or c (.) a Clydesdale.

6 Bill: Oh, he was definitely a mustang.
7   He was one hot son of a bitch <[sʌmbɪʧ]>
8   (laughter)
9   We gave each other a ride (.) we did a lot of licking
10   we did a lot of fucking and (.) uh (.)
11   there wasn't [wədnt] much left to behold at the end of the night.
12   He was a WILD guy, boy I --

13 MC: -- I have one more follow-up question.
14   Was there a photo finish?
15   (laughter)
16   Is this something I could find on-line?
17   (laughter)

18 Bill: Weeell, let's put it this way
19   we were neck-and-neck and nose-to-nose and ass-to-ass a number of times.

20 MC: Ladies and gentlemen…

Unlike other questions, the multiple-choice form does not provide a clear opening for sexual humor. In line 13, the MC thus introduces a "follow-up" to return the interaction to sexual innuendo (as opposed to the sexual description offered by the contestant in lines 7-12). Given the reference to the internet in line 16, the inferred question expected from the "photo finish" question in line 14 seems to be "did you take pictures?" However, Howard interprets the question as referring to the position of horses in a photo finish ("neck and neck" in line 19). This is the more natural interpretation for someone who works with thoroughbreds, as photos are taking in all races and a "photo finish" only refers to cases in which the photo must be reviewed to determine the winner. Although Howard does not follow through with the inference introduced by the M.C., the follow-up question allows the contestant a chance to introduce sexual humor (through linking "neck and neck" to "ass to ass" in line 19).

The Pecs and Personality competition provides contestants with an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to participate in fairly typical sexual banter as a means of conveying social attributes that are viewed positively within norms of gay male culture such as verbal acuity (or wittiness) and an awareness of camp humor. In the introductions at IML, BDSM sexual practices are positioned as equivalent to postively-valued non-sexual activities. In the cases of introductions, the adequation minimized the sexual nature of BDSM practices by linking them to non-sexual everyday activities. In the interview during the Pecs and Personality portion of the competition, this adequation operates in the opposite direction, sexualizing the everyday hobbies and interests through sexual innuendo.

3.3 Platforms

The final competition occurs on the Sunday afternoon of IML weekend. The twenty finalists compete, appearing in a jockstrap or thong for the physique competition and in giving a prepared speech in their "full leather" outfit. In addition to the competition, there are speeches from leaders in leather organizations and entertainers, including comedian Hal Sparks and a contortionist named Viveniamin (also known as *The Human Slinky*). Many of the contestant speeches introduce a platform outlining the political or social issues the candidate plans to promote if he wins the IML title. Platforms include education about the dangers of crystal methamphetamine (particularly as it relates to unsafe sex), domestic abuse in LGBT relationships, creating websites with "real meaning" (rather than simply cruising on-line), the importance of becoming adoptive parents, and fighting for human rights of gay men and lesbians in countries

where homosexuality is a crime. The speeches must be limited to ninety seconds (and the microphone is cut off if a contestant goes over time).

Although the content of the speech is entirely open, contestants are expected to discuss issues relevant to the leather community. In his advice to potential contestants, Baldwin suggests that contestants conduct research on the history and traditions of leathermen, even providing a set of suggested readings. Most of the contestants are involved with a local leather organization, usually a leather or motorcycle club and Baldwin advises contestants to become involved with both local and national leather organizations. Contestants must position their identity as leathermen at the center of their self presentation. Given that alternative sexuality is often restricted to a *private* context and contestants must demonstrate their abilities as a potential *public* figure, the demands of the final speech requires performatively indexing identities that do not typically overlap in other contexts. The ability to maintain these (seemingly) conflicting identities simultaneously is demonstrated through the various forms of indexical disjuncture in the speeches themselves. Given this normative opposition between leatherman and public figure, few contestants have had experience presenting themselves in the manner required by the contest. Contestants are advised to carefully rehearse their speeches and practice talking about leather identity. Baldwin writes:

> Since most leather men and women don't usually go around talking about the leather lifestyle and the issues related to our sexualities, there is little chance to get practice at this. So, ifyou want to win, you must give yourself practice doing just that. (2004: 76)

Baldwin advises potential contestants to practice talking about leather identity out loud, pretending to be on stage even while alone. The speeches are clearly marked as performances through the careful pronunciation that indexes a "good speaker," an

indexical link that seems to overlap with speech that indexes gay male identity (see Babel 2006).

3.4   Indexing citizenship

Given that the contestants are being judged on their potential to serve as a public figure (or "a leader in the leather community"), it is not surprising to find contestants performatively asserting an identity as a "good" public citizen. By indexing social contexts associated with the ideology of citizenship, contestants assert an identity that aligns with that of a public figure (such as a titleholder). In some cases, the assertion occurs through indexing participation in public social interactions, such as experience in the military, public work with charities, or participation in local non-leather organizations. Some contestants make direct reference to their connections outside of the leather community as a means of indexing a stance as good citizens. For example, Richard Hite (Mr. Mountain Leather) discusses being a good parent:

14)

1	Many of you have told me that you can't adopt
2	and you can't be parents because you're gay.
3	As the first openly gay couple in southeast Ohio,
4	I stand here before you at the proud adoptive father of my two sons, Bud and C.J.
5	And last Friday, just two days ago,
6	I flew home to watch my oldest son's high school graduation ceremony
7	(cheers)

By claiming status as the "first openly gay couple in southeast Ohio" (line 3), Hite indexes experience dealing with public social contexts. Being open about one's sexuality can be seen as a basic obligation associated with participation in am imagined LGBT (or simply gay male) community, in which being a "good citizen" entails being unashamed about one's sexuality. The context of a father at his son's high school graduation (line 6)

indexes participation in a highly public event that is divorced from contexts specific to leathermen or gay men more generally. By conveying these personal experiences, Hite indexes contexts in which he has demonstrated what could be perceived as meeting the obligations of citizenship either in an gay community (by being an openly gay couple) or in American society more generally (raising a child through high school graduation).

Randal Buikema, Mr. Iowa Leather, asserts the stance of "good citizen" by referring to his participation in his local church community:

15)

1	I am the minister of music at the largest Presbyterian church in the state of Iowa
2	There are several of my church members here
3	including one of our associate pastors
4	Will you please join me in welcoming them
5	to their first International Mr. Leather competition
6	(audience cheers)

The fact that the associate pastor and church members would come to IML to support him indexes Buikema's closeness with an organization (a church) that is stereotypically positioned in direct opposition to leatherman culture. As with the mix of "hobbies and interests" in contestant introductions, indexical analogy allows contestants to performatively assert the identity of a good public citizen by indexing prior participation in public social contexts such as attending a child's graduation or participating in one's church.

While some contestants emphasze citizenship beyond the imagined leather community, others emphasize their position as good citizens of the leather nation specifically. This may involve references to participation in local leather organization, discussing leather-internal political issues (such as tension between Old Guard and New Guard leathermen), or simply emphasizing being open and proud about one's identity as

a leatherman. For example, in his speech during the IML finals, Bill Hoeppner (Mr. Ramrod from Fort Lauderdale, Florida) describes the personal symbolism of the three dark bands he has tattoed around his forearm:

16)

1	That first line, that represents a really great trick.
2	That second line is boyfriend material, possibly.
3	But that third line, that is definitely husband material.
4	We as a community live and play by a creed,
5	"Safe, sane, consensual"

In lines 1-3, Hoeppner explains that the three lines on his forearm refer to the practice of fisting. The lines mark how much of his arm his sexual partner can take in his rectum, with the arm just below his elbow marking "husband material" (line 3). In lines 4-5, he relates the three lines to the three parts of the "safe, sane, consensual" creed of the leatherman community. The tattoes are actually used to gauge sexual partners; they also involve having the code of honor within the leather nation symbolically inscribed on his body. This overt and conspicuous marking of leatherman identity indexes the values of being a proud and out leatherman.

3.5   Red and yellow coming together

Another way in which IML speeches index discourses typically associated with citizenship is the appropriation of diversity discourse typically associated with cultural and ethnic inclusion. In his speech at the final competition, Chuck Renslow (the founder of IML) directly addressed the question of diversity, stressing that he did not mean "just black and white, but also red and yellow." Thus, the diversity involved relates to sexual practices (in this case fisting and watersports) is algined with thatassociated with ethnic identity. Renslow also addressed building connections with lesbians, heterosexuals and

transgendered men and women as part of a larger "leather community" that extends beyond gay men.

The most common axis of difference in IML speeches is between the Old Guard and the New Guard. As Rubin (1998) notes, the distinction between old and new guard is largely imagined and has existed since the beginning of leather clubs in the 1950s even though the distinction is typically imagined as one involving ideological changes over time. Several of the contestants link acceptance of the new guard with tropes cultural transmission across generations. That is, tolerance of the new guard is a necessary condition for teaching younger leathermen the traditions and values associated with leather culture. Diversity discourse typically indexes similarity at a higher level of identity. For example, discussions of ethnic diversity in politics often evoke unity within the nation. In speeches at IML, diversity in sexual practices or styles of self-presentationis framed as different means of expressing a common interest in alternative sexual practices.

In his finalist speech, Mark Austin (Mr. Cellblock Leather, from Chicago) discusses how leather culture has changed over time, mentioning that early leathermen wore brown leather (instead of today's black) and that the first IML contestants wore speedos (instead of leather jockstraps) in the physique competition. He then links diversity in personal style with cultural continuity over time:

17)

1	At a recent event, one of my IML brothers
2	wore modern multicolored motorcycle leathers
3	certainly not traditional, yet just the twenty-first century equivalent
4	of what we do consider traditional
5	the green mohawks, pierced tongues
6	and blurred gender orientations of the younger kink community

7 also seem untraditional
8 yet these are the individuals who will evolve into the next leather generation
9 so look beyond the skin and into the soul
10 welcome all those with a leather heart and a leather mind
11 teach them our wonderful traditions
12 but learn to accept their choices
13 above all, join with them to live, to love, to have fun and to fuck

Wearing multicolored motorcycle leathers, instead of the traditional black, is treated as a contemporary "twenty-first century" form of self-expression for a leatherman (lines 1-4). The non-traditional style of the new guard (mohawks, piercings and androgyny) is positioned as the future direction of the imagined community (lines 5-8). Austin links these "new" ways of indexing leatherman identity with the importance of the "wonderful traditions" associated with leather culture (line 11). The outward diversity of personal style masks the larger unity (within "the soul") of shared sexual practice. The role of alternative sexuality as the unifying principle in leather culture is emphasized in the last line urging leathermen to "join" together "to have fun and to fuck" (line 13).

  The opposition between the Old Guard and the New Guard allows IML contestants to link diversity discourse to nationalistic discourses of historical traditions and cultural transmission. Indeed, references to the Old Guard are not particularly different from discussions of "Founding Fathers" in nationalist discourse. Although framed as discussions of diversity, references to the Old Guard inevitably index a romanticized era of traditional leather culture. Acceptance of both types of leatherman bridges the chronotope of the earlier traditional and untainted Old Guard with the chornotope of an idealized future and more diverse generation of leathermen. Thus, discussions of diversity in terms of (Old Guard or New Guard) stances towards leather

culture serve as a springboard for emphasizing the importance of intergenerational cultural transmission.

Mr. Washington State Leather, Rob Grant, links conflict between the old guard and the new guard with cultural transmission by linking respect for social/sexual difference with passing on knowledge to future generations.

18)

1	old guard, new guard, avant-garde
2	everyone recognizes the power of respect
3	but with that power comes the obligation to pass on the knowledge
4	to those curious about what we take for granted
5	those only curious about the leather scene today
6	may very well set its course tomorrow

References involving the importance of historical traditions within the leather community are central to most of the speeches in the final competition. On one level, these references may be aimed directly at IML judges, who are chosen because of their long-term involvement with leather organizations and political activism. Praising those who "came before" could be viewed as directly conveying praise and appreciation for the judges themselves.

The speeches assume a community that is large enough to include a wide range of individuals while maintaining assumptions of shared history and cultural traditions. This is perhaps best exemplified in the speech of Mike Gerle (Mr. Los Angeles Leather), the winner of the IML 2007 title:

19)

1	"It is unlikely that we will ever win the war for tolerance
2	until will are first willing to tolerate the variety that exists among our own kind"
3	Guy Baldwin said those words more than fifteen years ago
4	and it's something that we need to be reminded of on a regular basis
5	and probably always will, because we love to fight.

6   We have to fight just to be who we are
7   But instead of fighting our true enemies (H*)
8   we're often fighting each other
9   See the true enemy's not the old guard,
10   the true enemy's not the new guard
11   We're this one continuously evolved guard.
12   The true enemy is intolerance

Gerle begins his speech by quoting Guy Baldwin who held the title of Mr. International Leather 1989, has written widely about leather culture, and is a respected leader within the leather community. Through quoting a previous IML titleholder, Gerle frames the diversity trope within the context of cultural transmission. Within discourses associated with banal nationalism, diversity is typically framed in terms of the larger ideology of national unity and similarity that is central to nationalistic discourse.

As Bilig (1995) notes, appeals to multiculturalism always assume a larger national identity, a trope that is reproduced in many of the IML contestant speeches. Although many of the contestants make specific appeals to tolerance and the acceptance of diversity, they are always framed within a larger imagined leather community. Indexical markers of citizenship and nationalism also apply across many different levels, from local leather clubs to national leather organizations and from town to nation. However, common forms of language tend to index participation in these different communities and the status of the larger nation (typically the United States) is never questioned. This is common within discourses of multiculturalism in which identity politics is tied to the historical adaptability of the nation. As Biling notes, "although multiculturalism might threaten old hegemonies, which claimed to speak for the whole nation, and although it might promise and equality of identities, it still typically is constrained within the notion of nationhood." (1995: 148) Although the appropriation of nationalistic discourse allows

IML contestants to claim a space for leathermen within the imagined community of 'good citizens,' the larger concept of nationhood is reinforced through repeated references to military service and patriotic displays like the national anthem at the opening ceremonies.

Although the use of diversity discourse is often applied to distinctions like Old Guard/New Guard or fisting/watersports, they do not entirely substitute for discussions of ethnic or gender diversity. In contrast to cases in which members of groups that are predominantly white may appropriate diversity discourse to avoid acknowledging racism (e.g. Bucholtz 2011), discussions of diversity at IML include discussions of race as well as disability and gender identity. The organizers of IML strive for ethnic diversity. Contestants with titles reserved for ethnic minorities are always included in the contest. There is also a Mr. Deaf Leather contestant and ASL interpreters are available at all of the IML events. Within the ideology of leather nationalism at IML, a "good" citizen is one who embarces diversity and welcomes those who might feel marginalized within the leather community.

The indexical disjuncture produced through linking discourses of patriotism and citizenship with discourses of alternative sexual practices and sexual identities allows IML contestants to challenge the marginalization of lethermen without necessarily assimilating to normative pressures that confine leather sexuality. However, this disjuncture opens the possibility for some to argue that the politicization of leather contests has desexualized the original outlaw image of leatherman (e.g. Harris 1998, Preston 1991).

The tension created by the linking of citizenship discourse with leatherman identity reached a boiling point in 2010, when the winner of IML was Tyler McCormick, a disabled transgender man. Those who felt that leather contests had de-sexualized leatherman identity found justification for the fears in the selection of a man with a wheelchair and a vagina as International Mr. Leather. When the selection of McCormick was announced in The Advocate (http://www.advocate.com/News/Daily_News/ 2010/06/01/Trans_Wheelchair_User_Wins_IML_2010/), several commentors balked at the idea of an International Mr. Leather "without cock and balls." Some argued that McCormick should not have been allowed to enter, that he "cheated" by using the wheelchair to cover his decidely feminine ass, and that his selection represented the death of IML. Of course, others praised his selection as representing a new era of inclusion and openness towards immigrants to the leather nation.

4.0   Identity and context

Walking back to the Palmer House on Saturday morning, I pass two men wearing military fatigues and combat boots. I am impressed by the authenticity of their uniforms and their perfect military haircuts. As I pass by I decide that they must be partners who made a special effort in order to match one another exactly. A few steps closer to the hotel, I am suddenly confronted by a group of four or five more men in exactly the same military uniform turning the corner in front of me. As I reach the next corner, I start to wonder if they are part of some organized group of uniform fetishists when a young man in a band uniform carrying a trombone appears followed by more men in military uniforms. "That's a new one," I think, imagining that a fetish for high school band uniforms must be pretty rare. Since everyone seems to be coming from one block over, I

decide to go around the block and see what's going on, only to see two majorettes with a banner reading *Chicago Memorial Day Parade Salutes Iraq War Veterans*. My imagined uniform fetishists turn out to have been real soldiers all along. Disappointed, I return towards the Palmer House only to see two more men in the exact same uniform coming out of the hotel. Just as I am about to give into the anxiety created by the confused crowd of leathermen and war veterans, another couple passes by. The sight of a man in a Boy Scout uniform leading another man (dressed entirely in rubber) on a dog leash somehow brings me comfort.

Bell et al. (1994) argue that gay skinheads and lipstick lesbians inhabit a "safe" heterosexual space despite the fact that their displays of identity demonstrate performativity in much the same way as drag performers. Although context is crucial in determining how performative assertions are "read" by observers, local interpretive norms may just as easily interpret heteronormative masculinity as indexing gayness (as with my assumption that the soldiers in the Chicago Memorial Day parade were simply gay men with a uniform fetish). The ability for performative assertions to succeed depends not simply on context or social space, but on the cognitive categorization of an individual in the mind of any given observer. The success of a performative assertion depends on the observer recognizing the intended indexical meaning, so that the degree to which language (or dress or demeanor) indexes any particular social identity is restricted by the prior experiences of the listener/observer, how s/he has categorized those experiences as interactional contexts, and the salience of the relationship between particular signs (e.g. linguistic variables) and specific interactional expectations.

Forms of indexical disjuncture can be seen as expressions of agency in which individuals use indexical signs to display social identities that do not align with normative understandings of the relationship between indexical signs and the social categories with which they align. However, this agency restricted by both by the range of performatives that are recognized by listener/observer the constraints of the material and by the physical reality of individual bodies and the degree to which they can be altered.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

1.0   Subcultures and gender ideology

It is common for LGBT subcultures to be categorized as forms of femininity or masculinity without fully considering culturally-specific gender ideologies. Expressions of gender always involve a combination of signs, including signs that have no obviously gendered meaning. Rather gender is expressed through indexicality, with performative signs indexing not only gendered social identities, but also permanent traits and interactional stances. The various permanent traits and stances (and their associated indexical signs) are not inherently tied to gender, but come to be associated with femininity or masculinity within local gender ideologies. Thus bears convey masculinity by throwing away their razors while circuit boys convey masculinity by shaving off most of their body hair. Local gender ideologies may emphasize different personal attributes and attitudes that may be potentially associated with masculinity/femininity. For bears, letting hair grow where it may indexes masculinity through a natural, unaffected persona. For circuit boys, shaving off hair indexes masculinity through discipline and self-control. Social practices like shaving become normative conventions largely because of their ability to index permanent traits and stances that have symbolic value within local gender ideologies.

Various subcultures also maintain distinct ideologies of the relationship between gender and sexual identity. Although drag queens and radical faeries index sexual identity through femininity, the other subcultures have all been traditionally categorized

as expressing gay male sexuality through masculinity. Indeed, bears, circuit boys, and leathermen have all been traditionally represented as *obsessed* with masculinity. However, the ways in which different subcultures understand masculinity are quite distinct. For bears, a masculine persona may be an unkempt Southern working-class guy who avoids physical exertion and enjoys eating junk food while watching sports on television. For circuit boys, a masculine persona may be an athletic "player" who maintains a rigorous physical training program to maintain his "perfect" body to increase his opportunities for sexual conquest on weekends of drug-crazed partying with his buddies. For leathermen, a masculine persona may be a military drill sergeant who adheres to strict discipline, expresses patriotism, displays bravery and integrity, and has experience disciplining others. For barebackers, a masculine persona may be a sexually-aggressive rebel who defies authority and breaks all the rules regardless of the consequences. To simply say that a subculture expresses gay male identity through masculinity fails to capture the fact that masculinity means very different things in different subcultures. Given the range of competing gender ideologies across different subgroups of gay men, understanding the relationship between gender and sexual identity requires close attention to the ways in which gender is imagined within local cultures.

The gender ideologies of different subcultures distinguish local forms of masculinity/femininity from both heteronormative understandings of masculinity and from dominant understandings of masculinity within hegemonic gay counterpublic discourse. However, given the way in which gender expression emerges through multiple indexical signs operating across indexical orders, subcultural expressions of gender may simultaneously support *and* resist hegemonic gender ideologies. While drag queens may

challenge hegemonic understandings of gender, class and sexuality, they generally reinforce dominant misogynist ideologies. Similarly, bears challenge dominant gay male ideologies of physical attractiveness and heteronormative ideologies of the natural effeminacy and middle-class orientations of gay men. However, they reinforce hegemonic associations between working-class identity and masculinity.

Because appropriations involve a bricolage of indexical signs, subcultural appropriations allow for cultural distinctiveness through distinct indexical combinations. The selective use of indexical signs allows for the indexical evocation of another social group without fully indexing all of the stereotypes associated with that group. Bear appropriations of working-class masculinity are thus able to maintain an assertion of masculinity through class associations while maintaining a social persona that is not aggressive, violent or racist. This is true even in cases that might not involve appropriation, as the individual expression of identity always draws from a variety of indexical signs. Thus circuit boy use of camp sensibilities indexes a gay identity without fully disrupting an overall impression of masculinity.

Because sexual identity emerges through associations with personal traits, stances and specific interactional contexts, gender is not the only category that may potentially index sexual difference. Among the subcultures considered here, sexual identity involves indexical markers typically associated with class, ethnicity, political stance, and regional identity. Because signs operate across indexical orders, a sign typically associated with class may index permanent traits used in the social construction of sexual identity (largely independent from class identity). Gender and sexual identities are expressed

through means that extend well beyond traditional assumptions of masculinity and femininity.

Since Butler's initial praise for drag queens as exemplars of the performative nature of gender, LGBT subcultures have regularly been analyzed in terms of performative challenges to heternormativity (e.g. Bell et al. 1994; Halberstam 1998, 2005; Hanson 2007). However, a deeper understanding of the ways in which gender is conveyed in society requires understanding the ways that performativity is actually achieved through the interaction of indexical meanings. While it has long been recognized that gender is typically expressed in particular ways influenced by factors like class and ethnicity, the semiotic realization of all forms of gender expression is entirely dependent on language ideologies that simultaneously incorporate gender, class, and ethnicity (in addition to other possible correlations).

2.0   Subcultures and gay male identity

The diversity of gender ideologies in gay male subcultures suggests that most generalizations about gay identity (i.e. beyond claiming a sexual attraction to other men) do not hold for all gay men. Indeed, the ideology of one subculture is often in opposition to another. While circuit boys may have middle-class aspirations, bears have working-class aspirations. Drag queens, radical faeries, circuit boys, bears, and leathermen all participate in forms of fund-raising for AIDS charities working to increase HIV prevention, while barebackers openly defy the very norms of public health these same organizations promote. Bears and circuit boys promote a view of masculinity that is non-aggressive and non-violent, while aggression and the potential for violence are often a basic part of identities as barebackers or leathermen.

Although the forms of social discourse that circulate within and across LGBT communities are often portrayed as a single counterpublic discourse, the politics of subcultural identity within LGBT communities convey counter-counterpublic stances that interact with both heteronormative publics and LGBT counterpublics. Although subcultural identities may be positioned as forms of resistance to gay normativity, the interactions between subcultural discourse and gay counterpublic discourse is often much more complex. Leathermen may challenge assimilationist ideologies by proudly asserting their "outlaw" image, but they may simultaneously present themselves as everyday citizens interested in maintaining strong marriages and being good fathers. Barebackers may resist dominant ideologies of public health that insist on using a condom "every time," but they may still assert identities as rational and moral men who are concerned with the overall welfare of their community. The polyphonous nature of indexicality allows for cultural discourses that cannot be easily categorized as either 'normative' or 'subversive'.

One of the main critiques within queer theory is questioning and challenging forms of normativity. Often, normativity is portrayed as if it were essentially tied to heterosexuality. For example Duggan's (2002) concept of 'homonormativity' refers to the appropriation of heterosexual normative behaviors in LGBT communities (such as marriage or parenthood). However, normativity is an inescapable precursor to performativity. Because performativity depends upon the recognition of indexical meanings (as citations), normative assumptions concerning indexicality are a prerequisite for felicitous performative assertions of identity. Anti-normativity requires normativity within a smaller (counter)counterpublic discourse. It could easily be argued that

barebackers represent the ultimate anti-normative subculture, particularly within dominant representations that emphasize their supposed desire for HIV-infection. However, barebacker social and sexual practices are incredibly normative, following highly normative sexual scripts that indexically reinforce the "anti-normative" stance of barebacker identity.

Local forms of normativity are based upon local political economies of identity, in which specific personal traits (and the signs that index them) have high symbolic value. The idealized social persona (reflecting the prototypical member of a subculture) is associated with specific personality traits, interactional styles, and affiliations with other social groups. The importance of local ideologies of identity extends to a wide range of sexual and social practices. Norms for sexual interaction are regulated by normatively valued social identities. For bears, leathermen, circuit boys, and barebackers, sexual interactions index masculine identities. However, the different ways in which sexual interactions occur within a given subculture indexes local ideologies of masculinity (see Hennen 2008). Thus bears and radical faeries expect sexual interactions to occur naturally and spontaneously, reflecting the importance of the "natural" in both subcultures. Leathermen typically schedule sexual interactions in advance, such as with play parties, indexing an ideology of masculinity that values discipline and self-control. Similarly, circuit boy sexual interactions are often scheduled, particularly at after-parties during circuit weekends. This reflects a view of masculinity as disciplined, similar to leathermen. However, leatherman sexual interactions are often fairly egalitarian in terms of participation by all attendees at a play party (and often invitations are open). In contrast, circuit boy sexual interactions depend on a competitive search for partners

indexing the importance of competition in circuit boy ideologies of masculinity. The normative barebacker script, involving gang bangs at play parties, indexes the masculinity of "gang" brotherhood (particularly among the tops involved) and the assumed natural desire for semen exchange associated with the persona of a cumslut. In all cases, sexual interactions are founded upon local subcultural ideologies of how specific forms of participation in a sexual market index a particular subcultural identity.

Local ideologies of identity even influence the ways in which subcultures imagine themselves as a community. Drag queens see themselves as a *family*, radical faeries see themselves as a *movement*, circuit boys see themselves as a *tribe*, bears and barebackers see themselves as a *brotherhood*, and leathermen see themselves as a *nation.* In all cases, the imagination of community indexes the idealized social persona associated with subcultural identity. The circuit tribe indexes the primal sexuality, experimentation with drugs and strict adherence to ritual associated with the social identity of the circuit boy elite. The bear brotherhood indexes the ideology of going natural while evoking both essential relatedness (as brothers) and working-class identity (as in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters). The leather nation evokes the importance of political unity and patriotism associated with the idealized public leatherman represented by contestants at IML. Thus local subcultural political economies of identity surface in everything from how people see themselves as a social group to how they go about having sex with one another.

Although I have presented each subculture individually, they are not entirely distinct. Even in cases where subcultures seem to be in opposition, there are individuals who cross boundaries. Although the idea of a "circuit bear" seems to violate the dominant

ideologies of both bears and circuit boys, there are gay men who identity as such. A fuller understanding of the nature of LGBT communities and forms of LGBT identities requires recognizing the wide range of diversity within those communities and the ways in which individual expressions of identity interact with broader forms of social discourse that are often the focus of cultural analysis.

3.0   Subcultures and language

Within the field of language and gender studies, ethnographically local understandings of gender ideology that emerge from everyday language use inform a more general understanding of dominant ideologies of gender that circulate in social discourse (see Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992). However, stereotypes about gendered language use, such as Lakoff's (2004) Women's Language continue to play an important role in understanding normative gender ideologies (see Bucholtz 2004, Bucholtz and Hall 1995). The performative assertion of gendered identity is dependent on local gender ideologies, which are themselves influenced by broader ideologies circulating in social discourse. The same is true of the linguistic construction of sexual identity. Although the belief that gay men are effeminate and talk like women is rejected by masculinist subcultures like circuit boys and leathermen, the ideology of gay male effeminacy continues to influence the contexts in which gay identity is conveyed. Thus, among circuit boys, forms of camp that have been traditionally associated with femininity are combined with stereotypical indices of masculinity to assert forms of masculinity that is differentiated from stereotypical heterosexual expressions of masculinity. Like Lakoff's Women's Language, Bill Leap's examination of Gay Men's English (1996, 2004) illuminates a set of interactional norms that influence gay male language use even in

subcultures that are socially positioned in opposition to gay counterpublic discourse. The high value placed on camp interactions in *Circuit Noize* or the Pecs and Personality competition at IML reflect the interactional norms described by Leap (1996). The public circulation of stereotypes concerning gay men's speech produces an easily recognized citation for indexing gay identity.

Studies in the phonetic perception of sexual identity (see Munson and Babel 2007 for a review) have begun to examine the ways in which speech that is perceived as stereotypically gay overlaps with other possible categorizations ranging from how tall one sounds to being a "good speaker." These perceptual studies enlighten the range of indexical meanings associated with specific linguistic patterns (such as the articulation of vowels). Individuals adjust their use of indexical signs to highlight particular aspects of identity across different social contexts (see Podesva 2006). Within local communities such as subcultures, patterns of indexicality become locally normative, indexing a specific stereotyped social persona associated with local (or subcultural) identity. Phonetic studies and ethnographic studies are thus approaching a unified understanding of how language is used to convey sexual identity. In all cases, the polyphony produced through the relationships between indexical signs across indexical orders is central to understanding how sexual identity is constructed through language.

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