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Andrew G. Childs

*Bound but determined: Reproduction and subversion in Folsom's, IML's, and Seattle's gay
leather communities*

Andrew G. Childs

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Committee members: Michael Brown (chair), Larry Knopp, Kim England, and Shirley Yee
(GSR)

Department of Geography

The University of Washington

Abstract:

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Andrew G. Childs

Chair of the supervisory committee:

Michael Brown

Geography Department

Through a more place-based conceptualization, this dissertation critiques the concept of hyper-masculinity within the social sciences generally, and the discipline of geography particularly. Hyper-masculinity is often a taken-for-granted term and while social scientists typically understand gender as socially constructed, the ways that social scientists and geographers use hyper-masculinity is monolithic and ironically, essentializing. Through my examination of hyper-masculinity within the gay, male, leather subculture, I offer a conceptualization of hyper-masculinity that is more closely related to the places where folks (mostly men) perform it. These performances are more than just claiming a gender type—they are also about territorializing space. Through these territorial displays, the men in this community authenticate space as theirs and they also bring other concepts under the purview of hyper-masculinity; concepts like: sexuality, care, race, and class. Finally, from my own auto-ethnographic experience with the community, I conclude with a frank discussion concerning how hyper-masculinity informs the behavior of the members of this community, and consequently, my own understanding and exhibition of this behavior and the subsequent knowledge I have produced. This emotional take on hyper-masculinity is both one that relates to my experience with the community, but also one

that relates to my experience with academic knowledge production—as masculinism is still present within the academy. I conclude that future directions of scholarship for geographies of masculinities would find fruitful avenues if we take up the concept of abuse between men more ardently. There is a lacuna of scholarship concerning this topic and this lack speaks both to the uneasiness of the topic that men generally feel, and the uneasiness of the topic as a viable object of inquiry within the geography.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Critics have noted a crisis in masculinity (Jackson 1991; Jhally et al. 1999; Hopkins 2009; Connell 2005; Edwards 2006; Ta 2006; Edwards and Jones 2009; Hopkins & Noble 2009; Way 2011; Kimmel 2012). These scholars attribute the crisis to anxiety among men spawning from the forces of industrialization, deindustrialization, the so-called invasion of women into the workplace, and a loss of control over the terrain and displays of masculinity. Cast against the relief of political and cultural changes (affirmative action policies, same-sex marriage, more women entering traditionally male-dominated fields) and fueled by a desire to understand this apparent crisis, masculinity studies has blossomed outside and within geography (see especially Longhurst 2000; Simpson 2004; Connell 2005; Vanderbeck 2005; Cupples Guyatt, and Pearce, 2007; Peake 2009). Some scholars have associated this crisis with men performing masculinity in extreme ways, such as through violence, dress, and militarism (Bell et al. 1994; Aitken 2006; Atherton 2009; Vanderbeck 2005; Hohn & Moon 2010). Another term for these extreme performances is *hyper-masculinity*. As the main concept of analysis, I situate my research on hyper-masculinity using the crisis as a starting point. Specifically, I am interested in performances of hyper-masculinity and men's experiences of embodiment within the gay, leather community.

I have chosen the leather community for two main reasons. First, it is a subculture in which I am already involved personally; this gives me access to this community and intimate insider knowledge about the workings of the community I am studying. As Cuomo and Massaro (2014) maintain, being an insider allows researchers a level of depth that outsider status would

otherwise preclude. Second, the leather community is understudied within geography and current conceptual work does not offer a place-based conceptualization of hyper-masculinity.

Understanding this community that claims to borrow features of masculinity from what they perceive as straight masculinity can help geographers speak back to theories of gender. Put differently, knowing what one subculture (in this case the gay, male, leather subculture) believes is important can tell us what that subculture believes is important. This knowledge helps us explain that subculture more thoroughly. With these motivations in mind, the purpose of this exploratory research (Babbie 2002) is to push the boundaries of geographical understandings of masculinities and provide a more nuanced understanding of how queer men reify, reconfigure, and resist norms surrounding hyper-masculinity (and by extension, masculinity). I draw from geographies of embodiment (Irigaray & Marion 2003; Gorman-Murray 2009), geographies of masculinities (Bell et al. 1994; Hopkins & Noble 2009; Hopkins & Gorman-Murray 2015) and geographies of care to form the theoretical matrix of my understanding and deconstruction of the places of the leather community. Additionally, these theoretical underpinnings help to explain how those places and members of the community perform a particular form of hyper-masculinity (Ramakers 2000; Tattleman 2005; Hennen 2008, 2008; Goltz 2007).

Current conceptual work on masculinities is lacking because geographies of masculinities do not offer a nuanced enough, place-based, conceptualization of hyper-masculinity. The result is, on the one hand, theoretical work that oversimplifies hyper-masculinity and, on the other hand, empirical work that does not demonstrate the nuanced and even contradictory ways that folks (in this case mostly men) display hyper-masculinity. These displays are contingent on specific places and communities. Therefore, the *places* of the leather community either sanction or discipline these performances of hyper-masculinity—and sometimes they do both

simultaneously. Through participant-observation, recorded ethnographic interviews (n=15), numerous unrecorded, informal discussions, and (to a lesser extent) discourse analysis, I reconceptualize hyper-masculinity and (by extension) masculinity. The events I attended were IML (International Mr. Leather) in Chicago, Folsom Street Fair in San Francisco, and numerous leather contests and events in Seattle. I chose San Francisco and Chicago as field sites because they are significant places in leather subculture and history. Both cities represent early movements to establish a bona fide leather subculture post WWII. Additionally, seeing participating and observing in national and international events, such as those in Chicago and San Francisco, allowed me to place Seattle's subculture more appropriately within the larger subculture and history. This placing allowed me to understand how Seattle is similar and carries on national or even international trends within the subculture, but also how Seattle is different and unique. I looked at the experiences of men at these events and in this community to tell me something generalizable—something larger—about the concept of hyper-masculinity. In this light, much of this dissertation is inductive because many of the themes emerged during the research process.

Geographers have also explored the intersection between masculinity and sexuality (Bell et al. 1994; Bell & Binnie 2000; Knopp 1998, 2004; Hubbard 2007; Brown 1995, 1999; Filiault & Drummond 2007). Adding to geographies of masculinity and sexuality, this dissertation is partially situated within a 'geography of the erotic' (Binnie 2007) where pleasure and desire are equally valid objects of inquiry as, say, class. I use the gay, leather community in Seattle as my empirical focus to add to the body of erotic geography and to help broaden current epistemologies of masculinity within geography.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Essentialism/constructionism

While the debate between gender constructionism and essentialism is well-noted and somewhat staid (Assiter 1996; Sayer 1997), there is a loose consensus on the constructionist, de-essentialized approach. Feminist theory precipitated this approach within geographic thought. Some, like Butler (1993), began to understand the body as a discursive agent while others, like Dodd (1994) and Assiter (1996), called for an essentialist, or even biological, understanding of gender. Nevertheless, spurred on by theories like Butler's performativity, theorizations of gender became largely discursive. Bodies did not exist pre- or extra-discursively. If the essentialist/constructionist arguments had anything in common, it was a theorization of gender. How one conceptualized the body, whether discursively or biologically, was quite a different story. Nevertheless, a belief in the power of the body was critical to their respective perspectives.

One of the most notable theorists of masculinities is Connell (1987, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2002, 2005); she defines masculinity as, 'Gender practices with a certain configuration' (Connell 2005. p. 72). This is a gender-neutral definition. Other geographers define masculinity in equally gender-neutral terms (Berg & Longhurst 2003; Simpson 2004). Hopkins and Noble (2009) imply that masculinity studies has moved from essentialist understandings of gender to constructionist understandings of gender, and current definitions of masculinity support this argument (Hopkins & Gorman-Murray 2015).¹ Thus, a common theme for scholars (and certainly for Connell) is the definition of masculinity as a relational and structural concept. I argue, however, that theorizing masculinities in a largely discursive, strictly constructionist manner has potentially troublesome

¹ For an overview of a variety of topics related to masculinities within geography, refer to the book, *Geographies of Masculinity*, edited by Peter Hopkins and Andrew Gorman-Murray.

consequences. Indeed, some theorists have warned that strict constructionism leads to its own form of reductionism (Sayer 1997; Nelson 1999; Connell 2005; Gunnarsson 2011). Even Connell (2005) quips, ‘The constitution of masculinity through bodily performance means that gender is vulnerable when the performance cannot be sustained’ (p. 54). Butler might retort that performances are never static; they are, therefore, sustained in some form. So too are gender and the (male) body. What theorists like Sayer, Nelson, and Gunnarsson claim, however, is not a stasis of the body (read essentialism); rather, the body has certain recalcitrant properties and people of the same perceived gender have a common, shared experience based on the body.

If it is dangerous to theorize the male body as a largely discursive agent, Sayer (1997), Connell (2005), and Gunnarsson (2011) especially warn that it is equally dangerous to reduce the body to a pre-discursive element. Sayer argues for a concept of ‘causal powers’ where certain generally (but not exclusively) shared properties cause other phenomena—a sort of family resemblance. I see this kind of argument as analogous to Gunnarsson’s (2011) argument where women can claim a common experience based on the body. The same holds true for men. What is especially germane to my research is that we understand what attributes of hyper-masculinity are necessary for its existence in a particular place and time. Indeed, it is necessary to catalogue the attributes of hyper-masculinity in relation to those performing it in particular communities to speak more clearly back to theories of gender—like embodiment or performativity.

Masculinities: origins and trajectory

Feminist geographers were early theorists of masculinities and they noted a masculinist presence that nearly dominated the spatial and perspectival arena of geographic thought (Haraway 1989, 1991; Rose 1993; England 1995; Lawson 1995). While groundbreaking, these

early theorists tended to define masculinity as an oppressive structure, intimately intertwined with patriarchy. Masculinity remained a largely taken-for-granted concept and was usually and justifiably only a target for feminist critiques (one poignant example of this taken-for-granted status is that *masculinity* and *masculinities* are still not defined within the *Dictionary of Human Geography*, though *masculinism* is defined). Expanding on these incipient critiques of masculinities, geographers have re-spatialized and studied the concept of masculinities in myriad ways (Jackson 1991; Bell et al. 1994; Longhurst 2000; Simpson 2004; Vanderbeck 2005; Henry & Berg 2006; Datta et al. 2009; Hopkins 2009; Hopkins & Noble 2009). Much of this work considers masculinity as not only a target for feminist critiques but also as a structure unto itself; it has become an object of analysis. Still, this later body of work demonstrates a largely empirical blossoming, rather than a theoretical or conceptual one.

Like other scholars (most notably Butler [1993, 2004]), Connell understands masculinity as a relational concept. Berg and Longhurst (2003) define masculinity in gender-neutral language. They borrow Connell's (2005) definition, contending that masculinity is: 'simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender relations, the effects of these practices in bodily experience, body, and culture' (Connell, cited in Berg & Longhurst 2003, p. 332). As I have noted, these gender-neutral conceptualizations are *mostly* constructionist—instead of essentialist—understandings of masculinities. Thus, geographers' theorization of masculinity is quite an open one and it misses the nuances of place and glosses over the different dimensions of hyper-masculinity within various communities. This glossing over also means that we miss the ways that performances of hyper-masculinity conform to preconceived notions and how those performances may undermine those preconceived notions. In response to this gap in the literature, my work analyzes the leather

community and its unique form of hyper-masculinity. Indeed, the leather community celebrates a particular form of hyper-masculinity, and understanding this form of hyper-masculinity can help to solve the problem of taking hyper-masculinity as a taken-for-granted term. I will also illustrate how the concept of hyper-masculinity within the community functions in some surprising ways, especially when it comes to men who conduct tasks of care. Likewise, the reader will also see how certain men fail at being masculine and I will highlight the implications of these failings for geographies of masculinities.

Around the same time as these early feminist theorists were writing about masculinity, the inchoate field of masculinities began to flourish as its own distinct realm of study. Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985), Connell (1987, 1992), and Jackson (1991) began exploring the multidimensionality of masculinities and extending the purview of the field beyond a discussion of traditional sex and gender roles. Within this emerging field, masculinities were understood through four category types, noted by Connell: positivist, normative, essentialist, and semiotic (Connell 1995, 2005). In addition to Connell's four categories, new theories about masculinities—like hegemonic masculinities (Connell 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005)—began to emerge that noted how dominant forms of masculinity were place specific. Moreover, because there were different flavors of masculinities in different places, the explanations of those performances of masculinities became complex and decidedly geographic.

One result, however, of theorists pushing the pendulum from essentialism to constructionism was that the ontological power of the body lost some of its significance. My research shows that the body in leather spaces is quite significant and is a fundamental concept that informs ideas about hyper-masculinity that circulate within the community. For my research subjects, the body is a main site from which they fashion their ideas about masculinity and

hyper-masculinity. Likewise, the body—as well as how my research subjects use it—is also a site that can undermine or contradict taken-for-granted notions about hyper-masculinity.

Much geographic work on masculinity considers the concept of masculinity in empirically, and increasingly in theoretically, important ways (e.g., Jackson 1994; Campbell, Law & Honeyfield 1999; Jackson, Stevenson & Brooks 1999; Butz & Berg 2002; Nayak 2003; Simpson 2004; Browne 2005; Vanderbeck 2005; Aitken 2006; Cupples, Guyatt, and Pearce, 2007; Atherton 2009; Cooper 2009; Datta et al. 2009; Hopkins 2009; Kenway & Hickey-Moody 2009; Mcilwayme 2010; Price 2010; Stanley 2012). Many of these geographers use their experiences in the field to augment current understandings of masculinities. While the list of geographers who have studied the intersection² of space, masculinity, and the body is robust, those who study the relationship between the concepts of space, sexuality, and masculinity is smaller (Bell et al. 1994; Brown 1995, 2007; Knopp 1998, 2005; Longhurst 2000; Brown & Knopp 2003; Henry & Berg 2006; Lim 2007; Gorman-Murray 2009; Hopkins & Noble 2009; Childs 2015, 2016). These scholars have examined, to a greater or lesser extent, the relationship between sexuality and masculinity and have exemplified the use of space as either a reinforcement of heteronormativity and homonormativity or a challenge to it.

Hyper-masculinity and sexuality

One must look outside of geography to find definitions of hyper-masculinity. While there are many definitions, my research subjects exhibited many of the properties encapsulated by

² I am speaking here of the intersection between masculinity and geographic thought. I am not making a comment on the theory of intersectionality. For a good discussion of the theory of intersectionality in geography, see Valentine (2007) and Peake (2009).

Goltz's (2007) definition of the concept within a queer context. Specifically, Goltz describes the hyper-masculine queer (H-MQ) as:

a masculinity (in terms of the H-MQ) that is rooted in traditional masculine characteristics of hierarchy, antifemininity, and dominance... As a minority masculinity, the H-MQ presents a complex construction of masculinity that is both excessive, potentially resistant, and queer, while still located within the (assumed White) male middle-class body and defined through aggression, authority, and domination. (2007, p. 110)

Halberstam (1998) contends however, for certain types of masculinity (Halberstam is discussing female masculinities), hyper-masculinity or excessive masculinity extends beyond or should not be reduced only to the male body. Butler (1993) makes a similar argument when she contends that performativity has something to do with the body but is not solely based on the body. Thus, while hyper-masculinity in Seattle's gay leather community, and indeed all of my field sites, has something to do with the body, it is not reducible to the body. Moreover, what may be hyper-masculine in one place, i.e. a leather context, may not be hyper-masculine in another place. For example, men in Seattle's leather community tend to think that stoicism is a feature of hyper-masculinity. Within a caring context, however, emotiveness is often seen and celebrated as a hyper-masculine feature.

As previously mentioned, hyper-masculinity within geography is a largely taken-for-granted and underexplored concept. While scholars have linked hyper-masculinity with the BDSM (Bondage, Domination, Sadomasochism) community (see especially Bell et al. 1994; Weiss 2011), few have explored how members in the BDSM community construct the concept of hyper-masculinity or the implications of this construction on geographies of masculinities and gender. Outside of geography, Margot Weiss (2011) is particularly useful here because she highlights the linkage between notions of heterosexual male dominance and race, class, and other

structures within the BDSM community. She maintains that we cannot think of the BDSM community as monolithically transgressive vis-a-vis heteronormativity. Instead, traditional gender roles are often reproduced within the BDSM community even though, as one of my respondent notes, ‘part of being in the fetish/leather community is that you can create new categories that do not correspond to traditional categories.’ Weiss reminds us, however, that other categories of identity, like sexuality, race, and class, are intimately bound up with gender and even fetishes. Thus, the spaces where we practice those fetishes can reify heteronormative and homonormative understandings of those categories. My aim here is to expose how similar linkages operate within Seattle’s gay leather community that simultaneously reinforce and transgress notions of hyper-masculinity and heterosexual gender roles.

Leather community is a problematic term, both for scholars and for my respondents because not everyone within the community agrees on what members should call the community. Indeed, Gayle Rubin (1993b, p.5) highlights the prickliness of this term when she states: ‘unique pleasures, particular pitfalls, and endless diversity of what we call, for lack of a better term, “leather.”’ Supporting this perspective, many of my respondents simply refer to the leather community as ‘the community.’ Others use ‘queer community,’ and one respondent rejects the notion that the community is an actual community altogether. Linking to this critique, we should also keep in mind Joseph’s (2002) and Muller’s (2007) critiques of community. They maintain that we often romanticize the concept of community; this romanization has the tendency to obscure as much as it illuminates. Both scholars argue that the reification of community legitimates gender roles, racial hierarchies, and class divisions. And while this legitimization is certainly true within the leather community—indeed that is part of my critique—I shall use the word *community* for lack of a better term, even though this use is problematic. The main point to

remember is that these communities are not solely emancipatory spaces of resistance to homonormativity; instead, they can often reinforce it.

Other scholars have used various subsets of gay culture to make claims about hyper-masculinity. In their groundbreaking article, Bell et al. (1994) use the term ‘hyper-masculine’ but do not offer a description of its features. This lack of description means they imply essential features without articulating them. Using the term ‘hyper’ implies that there is a starting point, an ideal masculine type that can either be hyped up, or hypo-ed down. If, however, we are to understand masculinities as temporally and geographically contingent (Berg & Longhurst 2003), then we need to discuss openly the way using terms like ‘hyper’ complicates this understanding of gender. By definition, all masculinities must have something in common—to use Sayer’s words, a ‘family resemblance’—because they all use the term masculinities. For my research purposes, I consider hyper-masculine as a concept of causal power, rather than implying some essential element. To achieve this understanding it is necessary to explicitly conceptualize hyper-masculinity. Heretofore, geographers have been remiss by arguing for masculinity as a social construction and using terms like hyper-masculine without explicitly defining the features of hyper-masculinity.

Intellectually, there is a problem with how geographers have used the term *hyper-masculine*. It rehashes the staid debate between essentialism and constructionism because it is undefined within geography and this lack of a definition and insufficient theorization results in scholars uncritically deploying the term (consciously or unconsciously) when they speak about constructions of gender. In the current climate of understanding gender as a construction, using hyper-masculine threatens to undermine much of the clarity and hard work that geographers have conducted to highlight the contingency of gender to space, place, and embodiment. My research

on Seattle's gay leather community is a somewhat self-effacing attempt to solve the problem of using an essentialist term by paying closer attention to the spatial particularities of hyper-masculinity in this specific geographic context.

Part of what I argue for is an understanding of masculinities through the theory of embodiment (Irigaray & Marion 2003; Gorman-Murray 2009; Nash 2010; Smith & Stanley 2011). All knowledge is embodied knowledge or, to use Haraway's (1991, p. 576) language, 'partial, locatable knowledge.' Our bodies' relationship to its environment helps to create embodied knowledge. And as Sayer (1997) contends, there are things that can exist extra-discursively; I argue that the body is one of them. This is not to negate discourse altogether. Instead, we need a more embodied understanding of masculinity. This approach considers how the body and discourses of gender operate together. Embodiment as a theory inheres the complex, social-body dialectical relationship. My work explains the complexity of this relationship between discourse and the male body by examining men performing hyper-masculinity within Seattle's leather community.

There is an irony to investigating a hyper-masculine community. In what should be the most essentialized of situations (gender at the hyper-extreme), we find variation, themes, and tendencies that contradict one another. Studying and understanding hyper-masculinity can help distill masculinities in general into more intellectually digestible parts. From that process, we can connect masculinities to other parts of our culture that are relevant for the social sciences. For example, men's use of violence as a facet of gendered power or, men's predominance in management positions in the corporate world can perhaps be better explained as we begin to parse out hyper-masculinity from masculinity, and even masculinity from patriarchy. Critics and activists are challenging masculinist power, which is eliciting a backlash politics. Cast this

political power struggle against the globalizing world and the social unrest that often accompanies shifts in economies and political structures and it is a small wonder how a fetish like leather (with its sexual undertones and role play) assuages or subverts the angst that men may otherwise feel.

Hyper-masculinity, care, and uncare

The concept of care is connected to the intersection of masculinity and sexuality and members practice care in myriad ways within the community. Within instances or ‘tasks of care’ (Conradson 2003a, p.508) is the larger argument that members within the community promote or subvert heteronormativity and homonormativity through their displays of hyper-masculinity. In regards to care, I argue two smaller points. First, Seattle’s leather community conducts ‘tasks of care’ in ways that simultaneously promote and subvert traditional gender roles. These tasks of care often expand our understanding of hyper-masculinity: what we may expect to find, i.e. stoic and aggressive men, is often countered by emotionally supportive and caring men. Second, the community performs care in ways that challenge and push the boundaries of more conventional notions of care. Ironically, however, this expanded notion of care often leads to instances of (un)care within the community.

Crucial to my argument are the threads of identity formation, how care and (un)care occur often simultaneously with implications for gender roles, and the reproduction of the autonomous self within a neoliberal context. Care may involve ‘caring for—that is, tasks of care—as well as caring about,’ which refers to emotional investment in another person’s challenges and anxieties (Conradson, 2003a). While both formal and informal channels structure care, the community has no formal way to deal with instances of (un)care. (Un)care consists of

those acts that may detract from the wellbeing of another person or contribute to their anxieties, challenges, or pursuit of happiness. Thus, instances of (un)care often remain in the shadows, though I found that members are willing to talk about these instances. It is important to note that the data I collected, and indeed, the idea to write this chapter was particularly an inductive endeavor. Thus, while I was deeply and explicitly concerned with masculinity and the body within the community, I was not focused on care as a framing or practice when I began my research process; care emerged as a salient concept *during* and *in response to* the research process.

There are many conceptualizations of care (Tronto 1993; Mol 2008; Hall 2011). These authors generally conceptualize care similarly and note that care, and by implication uncare, can occur at varying degrees of intensity. Care can also occur be interpersonal as well as humans caring for animals, places, or even objects. For our purposes here, we are primarily concerned with care as an interpersonal concept. So, one task of care or uncare may have little effect on someone—like saying thank you. Other tasks may have more drastic effects on someone like a crime. I find Conradson's (2003a, 2003b) conceptualization the most effective. Care is 'the proactive interest of one person in the well-being of another' (Conradson 2003, 508). Care may involve 'caring for—that is, tasks of care—as well as caring about,' which refers to emotional investment in another person's challenges and anxieties. This general conceptualization of care is necessary because the instances of care I witnessed fell at many different places on the spectrum of what might constitute care. As a relational concept, care also embodies scale and scope (Popke 2007). Scale, of course, inheres the proximity or distance at which caring might occur. Scope comprises the spaces where care occurs and the social relations that course through those spaces. Care within Seattle's leather community and the larger leather network between Chicago

and San Francisco occurs both proximately and distantly. Many of the types of care, like providing someone with a job, occur in Seattle but in other cities as well. Thus, the intent behind ethic of care transcends the scale of cities or particular places—and so does the ethic of uncare.

Care may occur in material or immaterial forms (Brown et al. 2015). There is a large body of scholarship within geography that considers the concepts of material/immaterial and effective/affective care (Atkinson, Lawson & Wiles 2011). For the purposes of this research, material care refers to tangible objects or things, whereas immaterial care refers generally to emotional care. Effective care has a longstanding tradition within the biomedical realm and scholars have often viewed effective care as easier to measure and sometimes more important than affective care. Affective care has more to do with experiential dimensions of care that extend beyond efficiency and effectiveness—especially outside of a biomedical context. I observed both material and immaterial forms of care. I use examples of both to speak back to my argument concerning the simultaneous reinforcement and subversion of gender roles and the complexity of hyper-masculinity.

Geographers have exposed the gendered and placed nature of care (England 2000a, 2010; Wiles 2003), chronicling how care is often feminized and framed as private. In my work, I demonstrate how care within Seattle's leather community is also placed and gendered but in a particularly masculine and hyper-masculine way. Interwoven with the reproduction of a hyper-masculine archetype, instances or tasks of care often reify the self as an autonomous being. My subjects' reproduction of the autonomous self not only aligns with political rhetoric that straddles both sides of the political aisles (in the US at least) but also aligns with the neoliberal discourse of personal responsibility (Duggan 2003). Understood in this context, the caring actions within the community are sometimes acts of what Murray (2007) calls 'self-care.' I understand self-

care, then, as the responsabilization of the self for its own actualization and welfare. Thus, the actions of my respondents can be understood as self-monitoring and self-disciplining. My research subjects commit these actions oftentimes for the stated objective of sexual gratification or even transgression against heteronormativity and homonormativity; however, they often end up reproducing those same structures. Thus, while the leather community is a ‘bounded space’ (Atkinson, Lawson & Wiles 2011, 564), it is a space that reproduces the discourse of personal responsibility that is so indispensable to neoliberalism.

There is a body of literature outside of geography that discusses men doing care (Arber & Gilbert 1989; Kramer & Thompson 2002; Vuori 2009; Watson 2010). As this literature suggests, caring on the part of men is deeply embedded in patriarchy and, because of this unique and often troublesome relationship, care presents special challenges for men. For gay men, we have often had to conduct our care work (particularly in regards to finding friends and mates) in public—especially in bars (Brown 2004, Brown et al. 2015). Gay bars have long been a locus of gay culture, and scholars have criticized them as spaces of rampant drug use, misogyny, transmission of STDs, meaningless sexual encounters, and spaces that reproduce homonormativity, *inter alia* (Field 1993; Valentine 1994; Butler 1999; Bell & Binnie 2004; Johnson & Samdahl 2005). And while the leather community is not a gay bar, as we will see, it certainly contains many of these potentially uncaring attributes.

The community also attracts predators and lends itself to, or at a minimum blurs the line between, abuse and S/M play. Other scholars have demonstrated how performances of masculinity within the community lead to a hegemonic masculinity that is both supportive and subversive of homonormative gender roles (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, Childs 2016). Likewise, the types of care that men are practicing here are enmeshed with their sense of hyper-

masculinity. It is no surprise, then, that members practice actions of both care and (un)care. It is also important to remember that when these men make choices to conduct tasks of care or (un)care, their choices are not solely their own. Instead, these men are entangled in larger structures in society, like US masculinities and neoliberalism, and therefore the notion of individual choice is problematic.

ROAD MAP

The remainder of this dissertation broadly explores the relationship between masculinity, male bodies, space, and care. I offer a more place-based conceptualization of masculinity and hyper-masculinity, through analysis of my ethnographic work on the leather community. Chapter 3 explores how performances of hyper-masculinity within the leather community territorialize space to help geographers understand the relationship between space and bodies more clearly. Chapter 4 offers a more nuanced conceptualization of the term hyper-masculine to push the boundaries of masculinities within geography. Chapter 5 brings together the previous ideas of territorializing space and a more nuanced conceptualization of hyper-masculinity while linking to this discussion to violence against women (Pain, 2014). Pain is especially useful because she reminds that violence against women can sometimes be occluded by other acts of violence. Yet, she reminds us that violence against women, when considered in its proper context as a daily occurrence around the world, is drastic in its scale and scope. Building on these ideas, I critique the concept of care and challenge geographers' understanding of what constitutes care by demonstrating that care is contingent upon the spaces in which folks practice it. Finally, in Chapter 6, I link my experiences researching, and indeed performing this dissertation through publication and academic knowledge production, with current trends in emotional geographies. I

argue that while geography has expanded the borders of what is acceptable scholarship, certain topics, like abuse, are still taboo. The synergy of my chapter critiques shows that hyper-masculinity is an under-studied and under-theorized term with geography. This oversight means that other concepts like care and abuse are also under-theorized. These under-theorizations have consequence; most notably that geography is not as radical of a discipline (if we expand radical to meaning more than just Marxism) than we would like to think.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This research explains the relationship between hyper-masculinity, sexuality, embodiment, and care within Seattle's leather community through an exploratory, qualitative, methods approach. The relationship is one where one concept informs the other, and vice versa. Ultimately, I employed participant observation, ethnographic interviews, and discourse analysis. I have four broad research questions that address these research techniques and the issues of hyper-masculinity, homonormativity, and care. I have divided this chapter into five sections: 1, the introductory section. 2. Phases of research. 3. Participant-observation in Seattle. 4. Participant-conservation at IML and Folsom. 5. Practical implications of the research.

I created and pursued this project because I wanted to answer four main questions. 1) How do men in leather communities think of their bodies as objects of desire? 2) How do they understand and feel about hyper-masculinity? 3) How do they perform their hyper-masculine identities? 4) How do they territorialize space? Likewise, this project has also helped me discover what happens when certain masculine bodies fail at being masculine (in other words, when they are not hyper-masculine enough for the space they inhabit). I have also learned that hyper-masculinity can function in unexpected ways: For example, men in the leather community show care toward one another and characterize that action as hyper-masculine. "Real men" care. Typically, however, geographers have not conceptualized hyper-masculine acts as caring. In fact, geographers have only vaguely and by implication, conceptualized hyper-masculine acts as negative (Bell et al. 1994; Vanderbeck 2009). While much of my data supports this negative conceptualization, some of my data speaks to the contrary.

I have broken this methodology chapter into different sections. First, I outline the research questions. Second, I conceptualize the two terms *hyper-masculinity* and *homonormativity*. Third, I operationalize these concepts in two different phases of research: *interviews* and *participant observation*. This is a descriptive and exploratory research project; it is descriptive because I first seek to carefully *chronicle* the hyper-masculine displays of some of the men and women at these events and in the local leather community. I also note the performances of hyper-masculinity at these events and the historical significance of leather to the gay community. In short, I am describing the population to which my individual research subjects belong. The research is also exploratory because I endeavor to go beyond chronicling to understand *why* these men see leather and leather events as an outlet for the performance of hyper-masculinity and why hyper-masculinity in the leather community operates the way it does. In other words, I am explaining the social dynamics operating within my population (Babbie 2002). The two large events I chose are: International Mr. Leather (IML) in Chicago (<http://www.imrl.com/>) and Folsom Street Fair in San Francisco (<http://www.folsomstreetfair.com/>).³ I chose these two events because they are among the largest leather events in the world. Later in this chapter, I give descriptive accounts of these two events, but first it is useful to outline my research questions and process.

Research questions

³ For articles detailing the events, visit <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/09/25/BACG1L9B6Q.DTL> for Folsom and <http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/lgbt/Leather-world-Documentary-looks-at-IML/36396.html> for IML.

R1). How have men performed hyper-masculinity in the leather community and how have these performances linked homonormativity and hyper-masculinity in these spaces of the leather community?

R2). What does the performance of hyper-masculinity and homonormativity in these spaces tell us about how men territorialize space?

R3). How do the spaces of the leather community maintain or subvert homonormativity and hyper-masculinity and, by extension, heterosexual gender roles?

Conceptualization

While homonormativity and hyper-masculinity are my two main conceptual frameworks for this project, I also focus on the body, care, and neoliberalism as minor yet important concepts. I asked questions about these concepts and I discuss them in more details in the chapters that follow. Hyper-masculinity and homonormativity, however, are concepts that meander through the entire dissertation project, hence their elucidation below. These two concepts also explain the social dynamics and organization of the leather community better than others. Understanding hyper-masculinity and homonormativity within the community helps to explain it because these two concepts are present in nearly every action and interaction of the members in the community. Indeed, the community is predicated on performances of hyper-masculinity. Moreover, it is critical to understand that these two concepts are linked in a dialectical manner. Puar (2008) notes the linkage between gender and homonormativity. The two inform the other and, as the reader will see, my empirical data demonstrates this relationship. But more than just demonstrating this relationship, my data also suggests that the two concepts function in some surprising and unexpected ways.

I conceptually define homonormativity as ‘discursive and socio-material practices articulated by gays and lesbians that support rather than resist heteronormative, neoliberal projects (Duggan 2003, p. 50).’ To understand how I am using homonormativity and how I will measure it, I have broken it down into different dimensions and indicators (Babbie 2002). An indicator is the sign of the presence or absence of a concept; a dimension is a specifiable aspect of a concept. The following chart demonstrates my conceptualization of homonormativity:

Concept: Homonormativity Table demonstrating the conceptualization of homonormativity.

<u>Dimensions</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. Relationship status	Single, married, partnered, open relationship, monogamous, play together, or other identifiers of relationship status
2. Responsibility	Occupation, education, living situation, attitude toward ‘personal responsibility’, attitude toward playtime, attitude toward work/life balance, embracing choice, individuality
3. Sexuality	Gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, queer, or other identifiers of sexuality
4. Sexual space	Public, private, displays of homosexuality, displays of heterosexuality, sexual acts, number of sexual acts, public sexual acts, pornographic displays, fetish displays
5. Aggression	Verbal or physical acts like: shouting, yelling, name calling, whipping, hitting, etc.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 6. Ethnicity | White, Black, Latino, Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, or other indicators of ethnicity as one might self-identify |
| 7. Sexualized roles | Dominant/Submissive, Top/Bottom. Daddy/Boy, Master/Slave, Male/Female |

From the literature I cite (e.g., Jackson 1994; Campbell, Law & Honeyfield 1999; Jackson, Stevenson & Brooks 1999; Butz & Berg 2002; Nayak 2003; Simpson 2004; Browne 2005; Vanderbeck 2005; Aitken 2006; Cupples, Guyatt, and Pearce, 2007; Atherton 2009; Cooper 2009; Datta et al. 2009; Hopkins 2009; Kenway & Hickey-Moody 2009; Mcilwayme 2010; Price 2010; Stanley 2012), I expected to find that leather spaces simultaneously support and subvert homonormativity. I did not know all the ways this dual action would occur, only that I suspected that it did. Perhaps more surprising was how the concept of hyper-masculinity functioned in unexpected ways, i.e. it is hyper-masculine to be caring. Relationship status proved important only insofar as polyamorous relationships (of all kinds) are widely accepted within the leather community. These types of relationships are also seen as anti-heteronormative (I would also add anti-homonormative, although most of my respondents and folks within the community did not use the term ‘homonormative’). However, scholars have impugned just how anti-heteronormative polyamorous relationships are (Wilkinson 2010). Indeed, it is more prudent to think of open relationships within the gay community as opposing monogamy and sometimes opposing homonormativity, but not necessarily both. Nevertheless, with the growing acceptance (albeit limited) of polyamorous relationships in straight culture, this feature ended up being less a hallmark of ‘queerness’ or anti-homonormative behavior as I had expected in a theoretical

manner. The scope of polyamorous relationships within the community, however, does denote some departure from the norm. Add to this the visibility and acceptance of these relationships, the alternative dress, the celebration of kinky sex play, and the leather community does feel queer indeed.

If homonormativity is about regulated space in regards to certain heterosexual values and the neoliberal project, then hyper-masculinity is about regulated space in relation to certain bodies and performances of masculinity. As I have previously stated, we cannot consider these two concepts in a vacuum; rather, they are inextricably tied to one another and form a larger gender-sexual structure. For the purposes of conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement, it is useful to break each concept into its respective components. I am aware that is breaking down of concepts is an essentialist move—something of which I am deeply suspicious and later tackle. However, science relies on categories and concepts, and at the end of the day, I am a scientist. I feel compelled to follow this tradition within the discipline of geography.

Not surprisingly, because hyper-masculinity has not been an integral concept for many geographers since the mid-1990s (Bell et al. 1994) finding a definition of it within geographic literature is impossible; thus, using Goltz's (2007) definition proved useful. As we will see, however, even this definition is sometimes lacking in certain respects, especially when it comes to caring for and about others in the community.

Additionally, the concept of hyper-masculinity helped in understanding how men territorialize their bodies as: spaces of desire, vehicles of sexual performance, or a place to display a particular masculine ideal. Understanding the community's use of this trope also helped me discover how men use their bodies and perform masculinity to support and contest more

general understandings of hyper-masculinity within geographic literature (Bell et al. 1994; Vanderbeck 2005; Filiault & Drummond 2007). Below is the table of indicators and dimensions for the concept of hyper-masculinity.

Concept: Hyper-masculinity. Table demonstrating the conceptualization of hyper-masculinity.

<u>Dimensions</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. Appearance	Attractiveness, muscularity, voice, body type (muscular, athletic, skinny, twink ⁴⁵ , body-builder), hair (facial, chest, legs, arms), clothing (shirt size, shirt type, shirt design, shirtless, pant type, pant design, pant size), tattoos, piercings, jewelry, leather (wristbands, harnesses, hats, pants, shoes, chaps, or other leather adornments)
2. Behavior	Alcohol/drug consumption, confidence, language/word choice, sex, how sexual preference is displayed, swagger, sex roles, occupation, acts of sexual aggression (kissing, groping), acts of competition, honesty, frankness, caring, stoicism, anti-femininity

As Babbie (2002) notes, there are two main types of definitions for concepts within social science research: conceptual and operational definitions. The operational definition is the definition a researcher will use in the field, for their particular study. In my case, the conceptual definitions for homonormativity and hyper-masculinity I provided above will serve as my operational definitions. As with homonormativity, the dimensions and indicators of hyper-

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⁵ Twink is a somewhat contested term that generally refers to a young man of slender build and mostly free of body and facial hair. Sometimes twinks are associated with feminine features. The origin of the word is unknown.

masculinity I have outlined above mesh with my definition of hyper-masculinity and, therefore, are valid indicators for which to measure hyper-masculinity. I have had to amend my definition of hyper-masculinity when it comes to care because men spoke of tasks of care as displays of hyper-masculinity.

Phases of research

Phase I: Ethnographies/biographies

In this phase of my research I interviewed members of the leather community in Seattle and I spoke to vendors, participants, and organizers at Folsom and IML. Many of the members who are active in the leather community locally are also active nationally and because of this activity I gained a better perspective of scale—from the local to the national. It is important to note that I did not limit myself to speaking only to men. I had two formal interviews with women (both Seattleites) and numerous smaller, non-recorded interviews with women at local and national events. Moreover, many members of the leather community invoke a familial language, where they speak of leather moms, leather daddies, sons, etc. This familial language demonstrates that leather is not only a space for men but also a space for women. Speaking to women helped enrich my project and it allowed me to make more comments concerning homonormativity.

Population

My population for this phase is all the attendees of both IML and Folsom, the local leather community of Seattle, and the organizers of the events. I could not interview everyone in this population so I devised a sampling strategy that I outline below to address this issue.

Sampling

I used non-probability, snowball sampling to conduct interviews. I have several contacts and friends who are active members of the local leather community. At the end of each interview I specifically asked if the person knew of anyone involved in the community to whom I should speak. Additionally, gaining the perspective of women on masculinity was important if I wanted to say anything about gender more generally. At Folsom, there is a section for women, known as the ‘women’s area.’ I spoke to eight women in this area; all of them were non-recorded interviews for which I took notes. I also spoke to numerous men and women at local events and in interactions at non-leather events. While much of my data collection did feel like research, much of it felt more like talking with friends because most people were very eager to discuss the issues I brought up. Additionally, because I was already involved in the community, several of the interviews were with people I already knew.

Units of analysis

My unit of analysis is the individual. I am attempting to extrapolate information from each person to say something larger about hyper-masculinity and homonormativity. In his discussion of units of analysis, Babbie (2002) defines attributes and variables of a researcher’s unit of analysis: An attribute is something that describes the unit of analysis, in this case the individuals I interviewed; a variable is logical grouping of attributes. This is similar to dimensions and indicators of concepts, but attributes and variables refer to units of analysis. The table below demonstrates my conceptualization of my units of analysis.

Table of units of analysis.

Variables	Attributes
1. Sex	Male, female, intersex, other ways one might identify their sex
2. Exact Age	For example: 21, 33, 45, 56 etc.
3. Ethnicity	White, Black, Latino, Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, or other indicators of ethnicity as one might self-identify
4. Sexuality	Gay, straight, transgendered, queer, other

Notice that some of the variables of my units of analysis and some of the dimensions for my concepts are the same. This similarity does not mean that the two tables are easily interchangeable; rather, it underscores that concepts like homonormativity and units of analysis can have some of the same measurable features. Moreover, there are practically an infinite number of indicators for units of analysis. What is important to note are those indicators that are relevant to the operationalization of my project.

Interview format

I started each interview with general questions about age, place of birth, how they came to live where they do, etc. I did not have a script because I wanted the interviews to be as conversational as possible to illicit comfort between my respondents and me. For this reason, I cannot give a script. Generally, I asked questions about parts of a previous answer and let that

process lead to an organic unfolding of information with conversation. I was clear about the subject matter of the interviews and this certainly helped people feel at ease. More importantly, many in the community are happy to laud the virtues and dispel the myths about the community. In this process, members were committed to demonstrating the charitable work of the community and demystifying the potentially intimidating reputation of the community. I asked all my respondents about their opinions toward many of my dimensions of homonormativity, like sexual space. In fact, I used my conceptualization of homonormativity and hyper-masculinity as guides for my interview questions. Because *homonormativity* is a rather academic word, I tended to use different words like *conventional* or *traditional* to get at what I needed. *Hyper-masculinity*, while also an academic term, is extremely well-known within the community and obviously has a specific meaning attached to it. During the interview phase, especially, I uncovered dimensions and indicators of homonormativity and hyper-masculinity that are not currently evident. These themes, like care and (un)care within the community, emerged inductively. Additionally, as other ethnographers have mentioned (England 1994; Rose 1997), the research process is one of becoming. Researchers need to be open to the changes that the interview process may take and how those changes affect the knowledge that one produces. Finally, for the first one or two interviews I followed a loose script. By the third interview I knew what I wanted to ask. Not looking at my notes and instead asking follow up questions in the moment made for a much more organic and seamless experience. Below is the script I started out using, but from which I quickly veered. While I did ask some form of the below questions, I used different wording for some and asked them at different parts of the interview. To maintain validity, however, I did always, explicitly, use the term *hyper-masculinity* and I also explained

what I meant by *homonormativity*. Aside from this commonality, I let the context and current of the interview dictate when and how to ask the below questions in different language.

Table of questions and the concepts they measure.

Rapport : **Homonormativity** : **Hyper-masculine** : R1, R2, R3

1. What is your name?
2. Where were you born?
3. Where were you raised/where did you grow up?
4. How old were you when you came out?
5. How do you identify your sexuality? R1
6. Can you tell me about some of your earliest memories of your sexual experiences? R1
7. What kinds of places do you see leather worn? Where do you wear leather? Bars, the home, on the street, etc.? R1, R3
8. How many serious same-sex relationships have you had? R3
9. Do you want to get married? R3
10. Do you think there is a difference in attitudes toward sex in the gay world versus the straight world? What about attitudes toward sex in the leather community? R1, R3
11. What do you do for work? R3
12. How do you feel about open relationships? R3
13. Do you consider yourself hard-working? Do you live by the mantra, “live hard and play hard?” R3
14. Do you remember when you first started getting interested in leather? R1, R2, R3
15. Why do you like leather? R1, R2

16. Do you have many friends in the leather community? R2
17. Are you involved in your local leather community? R2
18. Can you tell me a bit about your local leather community? R2
19. What sorts of activities do you participate in when you wear leather? R1, R2
20. Do you see a lot women and trans-folk involved in your local leather community? What about at these events? R2, R3
21. Do you feel like the leather community privileges a certain body type? R2
22. Do you know of any women that are involved in the leather community? R1, R3

As I stated, this is a very rough and largely unfollowed script. Instead, I used these questions as base questions. As the saying goes, I followed my nose. Often, I asked respondents, ‘can you say more about that?’ if they touched on a topic of particular interest. Because I was after quite a bit of information, many interviews lasted between one and two hours. Several interviews eclipsed the three-hour mark and one interview lasted nearly five hours and occurred over two days.

Ethical concerns

I required informed consent in the form of verbal, recorded consent. I also assured my respondents that I would not use their names. All my respondents stated indicated they did not care whether I used their names, and some even took pictures with their visible faces. Nevertheless, I never used their names or even pseudonyms. I always referred to my respondents simply as ‘respondents.’ When I digitally saved my information, I saved it as ‘Man A,’ Woman A,’ ‘Trans person A,’ and so on. Their names were only recorded on a sheet of paper next to their digital name. Once I finished transcribing my interviews, I destroyed the piece of paper. I kept the transcriptions on my personal computer that has virus protection and I did not save the

transcribed interviews on a shared server. In this manner, I did know the names of my interviewees and, therefore, I could not guarantee anonymity. I can and did, however, guarantee confidentiality. Initially, I was concerned that some of my interviewees might not be ‘out of the closet’ back home or in their local community. After speaking with all of them, this ended up not being an issue. Unless the interviewee asked, I did not send them a copy of their transcribed interview. None of them asked for their transcription. Several have asked for copies of my dissertation or chapters. After I successfully defend, I will send them copies of what they wanted.

Phase II: Participant observation in Seattle

As in the rest of the US, leather clubs sprouted up in Seattle after WWII. Many scholars (Bean 2004; Stein 2012) attribute this sprouting to troops returning home after the war and wanting to maintain the fraternal bond they had in the military. The first leather club in Seattle opened in the late 1970s. It was called the Branding Iron. As one respondent noted, ‘we had a leather bar in the Central District in 1978 called the Branding Iron. It was at 27th and union. Not a gay bar but a leather bar.’ He was insistent to point out that the bar was first and foremost a leather bar and any type of gay presence was secondary.

In March of 1989, Seattle Men in Leather, or SML, formed. Its main purpose is to unite people who have a common interest in leather in a mostly social setting (though at some of its socials there is kink-sex play). As one prominent member noted, ‘some members are upset that there isn’t more sex play, but we are primarily a social club, not a sex club.’ Thus, the origins of the club stemmed from a desire for folks who like the leather subculture to get together and socialize. Mirroring the transformation of the leather community nationally, SML has seen an increase in varying types of kinks and fetishes. Indeed, the term *leather* serves as a catch-all for various types of kinks and fetishes. SML performs a useful social function for many of my

research subjects. Often, it is the place where members meet a partner or discover they enjoy a certain type of kink; though, discovering an affinity for a type of kink would most likely occur outside of a sanctioned social event. More generally, its socials, leather contests (some call these pageants), and meetings provide mostly a social outlet for its members and anyone who has interest in kinky sex play. Often there are people who attend these socials who are not actively involved in the organization otherwise.

I attended numerous SML socials and contests. Figure 1 is promotional of one of their events. The socials are usually held at The Cuff Complex which is the home bar of SML. If you were to attend, you would see people in different types of leather gear. Typically, men wear harnesses, hats, chaps, arm bands, wrist cuffs, vests, boots, and any combination thereof. Often, men do not have a shirt on and may only wear jeans with their chaps over them or, depending on the bar and dress code, no jeans at all. Women typically wear leather skirts, arm bands, wrist cuffs, vests, bustiers, chaps, hats, boots, and any combination thereof. These lists are by no means exhaustive nor are they exclusive to men, women, or trans-folks. Generally, men tend to be less clothed than women, although this seems to be more of a reflection of societal standards concerning women and dress in the United States than anything to do with the leather community specifically.



Figure 1 depicts an advertisement for a Seattle Men in Leather gathering. It is a picture of a picture I took with my phone camera.

There are other socials and gathering spaces that are not officially affiliated with SML but cater to the leather community generally. One event, fetish night, is held on the first Saturday of every month at a bar called CC's. The fetish nights usually have a theme that may have little to do with leather *per se*. For example, one fetish night may be suits and ties, while another one will be military dress. Obviously, these themes are not squarely about leather, but the variation speaks to the catch-all characteristic of leather. Leather means more than just leather.

There are a couple of bars that cater to the leather subculture in Seattle. Most notably, The Cuff, which opened in 1993, is the home bar of SML. The Cuff has all sorts of pictures of men in leather, some of the bartenders wear leather, and there is even a real motorcycle up near the front entrance (by the time of publication of this dissertation, the motorcycle had been removed). The bar is dimly lit and purposefully decorated with pictures that promote the kind of seediness that the leather community celebrates. The front half of the bar is where people stand and talk and there is usually no dancing. The back part of the bar has a large dance floor. Sometimes SML will rent the dance floor space to hold a meeting, contest, or an awards

ceremony. There is no public sex occurring in the bar (or there is not supposed to be). The dance floor resembles most any other dance floor in other gay bars and it is common to see men with their shirts off as in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2 is a picture of the dance floor at Cuff during Pride.

The Cuff is not only a leather bar but also a bar that caters to the gay male crowd of Seattle generally. Nevertheless, it is the home bar of SML, and as one respondent put it, ‘it has a very leather feel to it, at least up front.’

Doghouse Leathers, as the local-to-Seattle leather store, is also an important place for the leather community. Nearly all the people who work there wear something leather while they work. They have extensive knowledge of the people and history of the community, and they are

welcoming to newcomers. The store has someone who specializes in leatherworking and they can make custom garments. The store also holds workshops on living and being in leather and the history of leather in Seattle. Additionally, Doghouse usually has posters of local events and most of the members know of upcoming events and the store sometimes sells tickets to these events. Many of the people who work at Doghouse are also active in the leather community, making the store a crossover space, as well as a gathering space for those in the community.

Sampling

I have created codes for my sampling strategy that guide me in my investigation. The most basic and general codes were: ‘hyper-masculine, homonormativity, care, uncare, bars, IML, Folsom, aggression, body depiction/description, attitudes toward women.’ I used deductive and inductive reasoning in this process. One of the strongest lessons I learned is that my research process is highly inductive. In a sense, I do not know what I am going to write until I write it. This inductiveness does not preclude organization and the testing of preconceived hypotheses or notions. It does, however, mean that the writing process is where most of my ideas emerge. Writing is research. Indeed, many of my ideas formed in the moment of writing. Writing for me is synonymous with analysis. And the codes I used to decipher and make sense of my data, coupled with self-reflection, helped me produce knowledge. Indeed, after writing for a bit, I often realized I needed to revisit my data with a new code to support the arguments I was making.

I used my conceptualization charts to help derive the codes that will ensure internal validity. I examined the relationship between leather and sexuality in its nascent stage. Was leather worn or performed in the same spaces as it is today? Where do people ‘do’ leather? Have

performances of leather changed over time? How is displaying one's sexuality tied to leather and how does this relationship function? What are the body types of people who wear leather? All of this information helped me develop an historical but also contemporary narrative of leather. The questions listed above helped me refine and envelop other topics as well. These questions were not part of the broad research questions I listed earlier; rather, they are smaller, more specific questions whose answers helped inform the overall goals of my project.

For the questions below, I tended to ask them later in the interviews. I demonstrate how each question related back to my broad research questions. Thus, for R1, I use the simple code: Performances of homonormativity and hyper-masculinity. For R2, Territorialization of the body. For R3, Spatial maintenance or subversion. From these codes, I developed very specific questions and investigation goals like:

Spaces of leather—where do we see it? R3

Historical origins of leather, including prominent Figures. R1, R3

Identifiers of leather communities (local, national, and international). R1, R3

Personal narratives of leather. R1, R2

Types of leather clothing. R1, R2

Who is wearing leather—images of the body? R1, R2, R3

This list is by no means exhaustive but provides an example of the strategy I used when conducting fieldwork and interviews.

Phase III: Participant–observation at IML and Folsom

IML/Chicago

IML is always held at a conference hotel, the last weekend in May. It started in 1979 and, while its name is ‘International,’ it is mostly a North American conference. Most of the people who attend are into wearing leather, the leather lifestyle (so to speak), the contestants, and friends and supporters of the contestants. Though IML has been around since 1979, there was a forerunner competition called ‘Mt. Gold Coast.’ Chuck Renslow started the “Mr. Gold Coast’ title and the title gets its name from the then named ‘Gold Coast Bar.’ Eventually the ‘Mr. Gold Coast’ competition became too large for the bar to hold and this size increase prompted the new title and competition of ‘International Mr. Leather’ in 1979.

The primary purpose of the event is to crown an ‘International Mr. Leather.’ To qualify to compete in the Chicago contest, one must: be a winner of a lower level feeder competition of a bar, winner of a local or regional leather contest, or be sponsored by a leather-related bar, business, club, or organization. While there are many leather contests around the United States, held at many different bars and for different organizations, not all count as qualifying contests for IML. At IML, there are two phases for the contestants: the first and then the second round. In the first round, all contestants have two sections in which they compete. The first section of the primary round is a private interview session (not open to the public) with the judges. During this round, the judges can ask the contestants anything they want. Sometimes the questions are specific like, ‘tell us whether you are in favor of barebacking⁶ in the gay community?’ while other questions maybe open-ended like, ‘sweet or salty?’ They also ask other questions about your interest in leather and general biographical information. This initial section of the first

⁶ Barebacking is having sex without a condom. There are new medications out now known as PREP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) that HIV negative men can take to allow them to have sex without a condom and not contract HIV.

phase takes place on Thursday and Friday. On Saturday, the second section of the primary phase, known as 'Pecs and Personality,' occurs. This section occurs on the main stage and is open to the public. The judges ask questions again and the contestants must answer in front of the audience to demonstrate their stage presence and public speaking skills. Contestants also explain their platform, issues about which they are concerned, and charities to which they give their time. All contestants are scored in both sections of the primary round (the highest and lowest scores for each contestant are thrown out). Once the scores are tallied, the final round with the top twenty contestants commences.

The final round occurs on Sunday of the weekend. There are three categories on which the contestants are judged: leather image, speech and presentation, and physical appearance. When I asked participants and judges about the qualities that mattered, there was only a vague consensus. Most people said that a 'good personality' was important and that physical attractiveness was also very important. Of course, physical attractiveness in this context conforms to many of the physical attributes listed in the table for hyper-masculinity. Below is a picture of the man who won IML one of the years I attended as a participant-observer (see Figure 3). His name is Andy Cross.



Figure 3 is a picture of Andy Cross who won IML in 2013.

The winner is expected to conduct a heavy speaking circuit. He is constantly asked to attend leather events around North America and Europe—either as a judge, speaking engagement, or just for fun. As this involvement is part of being IML, speaking and presentation is important. In fact, Seattle’s feeder contest recently changed its rules to put more emphasis on the speaking and presentation part of the contest. According to several members to whom I spoke, they wanted to make this change because there was grumbling that, in years past, some of Seattle’s representatives had less-than-adequate stage presence and poor public speaking skills. And while there have been many representatives from Seattle at the IML contest, there has never been a winner from Seattle. LA, San Francisco, and the DC area are heavily represented in the past years’ winners.

There was also disagreement on whether the contest is an actual contest or a pageant. Depending to whom I spoke, some used the phrase ‘contest’ and others used ‘pageant.’

Generally, those who used pageant had a negative perception of leather contests/pageants. They claimed that the pageants were little more than beauty contests and that one had to be pretty to succeed. From what I witnessed, physical beauty certainly plays a major role in one's success in leather pageants/contests. However, after speaking to attendees both at IML and members on the board of SML, both parties noted that the changes in the rules, which placed more emphasis on speaking and stage presence, are meant to reflect a growing appreciation in qualities separate from physical beauty.

Masculinity and its perceived bodily essence are central to the pageantry of the contests. The contests/pageants (members disagree about whether it is a contest or a pageant with Old Guard members usually claiming it is a contest) are run very similarly to a beauty pageant like Ms. America, though each local contest has its specific rules. At the Seattle Leather Daddy and Daddy's Boy Contest, there are local judges that may comprise past winners of the event, a judge that is randomly chosen, and the audience gets a ballot in the voting on the winners. Other chapters around the nation have their contests with variations on rules and the criteria for choosing a winner. At IML, there are contestants from all over the world, but primarily from North America, and each contestant participates in competitions to determine the winner. Each contestant at IML first must win a local competition, like the Daddy and Daddy's Boy Contest in Seattle. Around the globe, bars, social clubs, and local leather organizations sponsor myriad competitions. The competitions are feeder competitions; winning a competition that is a feeder competition for IML ensures your entry into the IML contest/pageant. At the local and IML scale, some of the contest's/pageant's categories are: closed and open interviews, a prepared speech, jockstrap competition (wearing a jockstrap on stage), bar wear (what you might wear to a bar), and formal leather wear (this might include chaps, leather shirt, vest, boots, sash, belt, and

hat). Many of the contestants bring a friend or partner along just to prep the clothing they must wear for each round. In the interviews and speech section, the contestant should highlight any philanthropic work they have done but also what type of kink and fetish they prefer, along with their history of involvement in the leather community. One respondent characterized his experience with contests as:

I did always look at the contest as, I was like, it's like a beauty pageant but with jocks instead of, you know, a bathing suit section. And I never quite really understood that there was such a big political aspect to it. I thought it was just sort of like a beauty pageant where, "who's the hottest guy in this outfit and what is he into, and what is his kink, and what's his specialty?" You know, just general statistics. I didn't realize at the time that it was a lot of politics, a lot of history, a lot of background knowledge that an individual would need to know to be able to compete in these things.

Again, a strong sense of history is important and obligatory for success in the contests. A sense of history, however, is not the only ingredient for success. Much of the contest is predicated upon the masculine look of the contestant, their ability to represent the leather community and their pedigree (what family they belong to and who was their Daddy). One prior contestant proclaimed, 'IML is representative of a very large community. Being able to be someone the straight or non-leather community can look to and not be afraid of I think is a very large part of it.' Moreover, the winner of the contests reign for a year and often the winner embarks on a speaking circuit. Winners of IML are usually invited to smaller local contests as judges or keynote speakers. All of my respondents who had participated in the IML contest stressed the need for the contestants to be able to travel most weekends out of the year and that keeping a full-time job was next to impossible. Often other bars or organizations will pay for your travel expenses but having spending money beyond that is difficult if you have not saved or if you do not have a portable job.

Outside of the contest, IML is a dizzying spectacle. Walking through the doorways of the Marriot hotel lobby (the host hotel for the year 2013), the first people I saw were men in leather gear, proudly posing around the lobby of the hotel. Even before I entered, I noticed men standing outside of the lobby doors, like gatekeepers of the leather faith. Unabashedly, folks in leather dominate the entire lobby of the host hotel. As night falls, their bodies become more numerous, bumping and thumping to the loud hum of constant conversation. Imagine the AAG meeting (on steroids, both literally and figuratively) with nearly every attendee wearing leather, some shirtless, some in ass-less chaps. The lobby is the gathering place; it is the heart of IML that pumps out men into the arterial hallways and vein-like rooms, only to yoke them back again to breathe new life into their sexually charged (and sometimes spent) bodies. The Greeks had their agora; IML has its lobby. Figure 4 is a picture of the lobby.



Figure 4 is a picture of the lobby at IML. A friend of mine took this picture.

Of course, all of this pumping is lubricated with alcohol and, to some extent, drugs. And as the picture above portrays, men are overwhelmingly represented at IML. Having said all of this, I found the lobby to be an encapsulating and captivating place. It is like a circuit party,⁷ but with little to no music. It is therefore easier to talk with people and carry on more than a cursory conversation. Indeed, nearly everything I needed to know, I learned in the lobby. Whether it was

⁷ A circuit party is a large dance event. It usually starts at some point in the night and is sustained and infused with a variety of DJs playing mostly dance, house, and/or pop music. It is typically crowded and held in large spaces. While both gay men and lesbians have circuit parties, they are more common within gay, male culture.

event times, places, or contestants' names, all were usually accessible via word of mouth. When all else failed, I went to the lobby.

A network of friendships (and many of these friendships have sexual components to them) is sustained at IML. Concentrated in one spot, the lobby represents the physical manifestation of the national and even international network. The first day I was at IML, I saw several friends and acquaintances I had not seen in years. Several of them I did not realize were going to be at IML. Because of its popularity, many people attend IML now, not because of the contest to crown International Mr. Leather, but to reinforce friendships and have sexual encounters. One respondent told me that usually only 250 people or so out of maybe 20,000 attend the final contest where they crown the winner. When I attended the final competition, I estimated there were close to 300 people in attendance.

Obviously, the space of the lobby mirrors gay bars and is susceptible to many of geographers' critiques of gay bars (Field 1993; Valentine 1994; Butler 1999; Bell & Binnie 2004; Johnson & Samdahl 2005). Moreover, because so much of the interaction of the community is sexual, there are many friends and friends of friends that have a strong sexual component to their relationships. None of this is surprising. What I found to be more surprising, but only in its scale, not its scope, was the brazen display of fetishes in the lobby and walking around the outside of the hotel and in its vicinity. Once I was away from the social acceptance of the lobby, I felt the need to cover my body. Others however, walked through and around the neighborhood of the hotel and surrounding streets in total leather gear, as if they were in the lobby.

While IML accomplishes normalization through legitimating certain kinds of kink, it is possible to stand out, or even fail. To be out of place, a walking anachronism so to speak, usually occurs when someone does not conform to the often rigid, but tacit, rules of being appropriately kinky and hyper-masculine. For example, on the second day at IML, I witnessed a man walking through the lobby who, by watching others' body language, failed at being appropriately hyper-masculine, or even masculine. There were several reasons that combined to make this failure. He was short, handcuffed, ankle-cuffed, wore a diaper, was in his late fifties or early sixties, and he was not speaking. I cannot say whether his race (Asian) had a role in whether he was accepted or rejected, though I suspect that it did not help him. However, I think it was his overall appearance and not speaking that contributed to his overall failure. Nevertheless, I was not with this man the whole time and he may have found someone that accepted him and desired him sexually. Thus, we cannot say that he was an outright failure. Instead, he existed in a liminal space between success and failure but hovered closer to failing.

His ankles and handcuffs were attached to each other with a chain so that he could only shuffle. His race, small stature, and dress all combined to render him a failure. He only moaned and pointed. He would walk up to a group of people and simply put out his hands in a somewhat pleading gesture, as if he was begging, and moan. I mention these characteristics, especially his race, apparent mental health status, and age to demonstrate that being successfully hyper-masculine relies on displaying these attributes in socially acceptable ways of the community.

IML is not completely unwelcoming of diversity—though if you are white and muscular you have an advantage. The social milieu of the lobby, however, means that one needs to conform to at least a couple of the attributes of what it means to be hyper-masculine within that place. Unfortunately, this man failed. His body, dress, race, and even his speech contradicted

what is usually celebrated. If he had been white, muscular, confident, aggressive, and displayed less infantilizing dress, he would have been a success. This is, of course, an extreme example and this man would have likely failed in other gay, but non-leather spaces for some of the same reasons. The point, however, is that IML, and leather spaces more generally, exclude based on the above characteristics. Interestingly, this man felt comfortable enough to handle himself in such a manner, which suggests he believed that someone would reward his behavior.

There is also a market inside of the hotel, separate from the lobby. The market is a space of promenading and consumerism. Its social dynamics are like the lobby's, except there is more emphasis on shopping and movement through the space than simply being in it. Normally, the market is in one or two large rooms of the hotel—often two since there are so many booths. It is usually three or four rows of vendors buttressing both sides of the aisles. One favorite activity of many attendees is to snake down each aisle. Sauntering down each aisle allows attendees to gawk, buy, or participate in the various leather goods, shops, and displays. Below, Figure 5 shows one of the aisles at the leather market.



Figure 5 is a picture I took of the leather market at IML in 2013. It depicts the booths of both local and national brands. This is one of 4 aisles and there are two rooms with booths.

Like the hotel lobby space, the leather market space is assuredly a space to negotiate sexual encounters as it is a place to purchase goods or meet friends. The market is also a great source of information. Any time I asked a vender about a performance or what time an event started, they either knew the answer or could point me in the direction of someone who did. Likewise, there are booths specifically for selling tickets to many of the events.

Along with selling leather goods and tickets, the leather market is also a space for exhibitionism. As I have previously mentioned and will take up more critically later, leather serves as a catchall for kinks and fetishes. Thus, while IML started as a small event for men who won their respective local leather contests to congregate, exchange ideas, and meet each other, it has turned into a truly international event with 20,000 attendees (though the clear majority of attendees are Americans). This explosion in attendance aided by technological advances in communication has allowed for unprecedented exchange of ideas. One result is that, along with the increased attendance and exchange of ideas, there has been a simultaneous explosion in kink and fetishes. Now, leather signifies nearly any kink one may imagine. For example, puppy play is now popular. Baume (2015) describes puppy play as, ‘A primer on the kink hat involves puppy hoods, wagging tails, fetching bones, and barking—but not necessarily sex.’ Men dress and behave like puppies and are usually accompanied by a handler—a man who is the puppy’s owner. Figure 6 shows a puppy in his cage at IML.



Figure 6 is a picture of man in a dog cage doing puppy play. This is at IML in 2013. I tried to talk to him, but he would only make dog-like noises in response to my questions.

Along with cages, there are puppy pens where puppies can run and play with each other while their handlers look on, usually with approving eyes.

Sex and sexual encounters are *de rigueur* at IML. One cannot write of IML without at least mentioning sex. When walking through the hallways of the host hotel at IML, I witnessed: cracked doors, wide open doors, people having sex inside their rooms (usually I had to walk in to see that, or I could hear what sounded like sex), and a general air of relaxed sexuality.

Nevertheless, the wide-open door or orgy is still the exception rather than the norm. Most doors and rooms are closed and locked as in any conventional hotel I have experienced. Instead, there are a few rooms on the entire floor that seemed ‘open for business’ as it were. This atmosphere of sexual promotion intensified as it grew later into the night. Still, out of the four nights I was

there, I was invited into two rooms purely by walking thorough the hallways. I expected many more opportunities in the hallways. Based on my conversations with attendees and friends, the best way to have a casual sexual encounter was to loiter in the lobby or go to one of the events/parties at night that were associated with IML. There are also parties held offsite where men go to dance, and where sex seems to be more squarely on the agenda. For the first few IMLs, these parties started as a way for those attending to celebrate the weekend. Now, these parties are on a massive scale with hundreds, if not thousands, of attendees. And while the lobby and the parties are not as sexually permissive as, say, a bathhouse, sex is usually only a ‘hello’ away.

Folsom/San Francisco

Started in 1984, Folsom Street Fair, colloquially referred to as ‘Folsom,’ has grown into the largest leather and BDSM event in the world. Folsom takes place on the last Sunday of September at the end of San Francisco’s leather pride week. It was impossible for me to get a feel for just how many attendees there were, but Folsom’s website claims there are annually around 400,000 attendees each year. More generally, San Francisco has long been a center of gay male culture, and leather especially has a long history within the city. It is no surprise, then, that the largest leather event in the world takes place there.

The area of Folsom Street, known as SOMA (South of Market), was a vital place for leather culture in San Francisco (Rubin 1998) in the 1970s and 1980s. There were countless bars and motorcycle clubs operating from and within that area. During the 1970s, however, the city began a gentrification of the SOMA area, which was at the time largely a warehouse district. As Rubin explains, City Hall began firing ‘revitalization’ policies at SOMA. The seedy leather

motorcycle clubs and bars had no place in the newly fashioned (and I would add, incipiently neoliberal) glamorous image of City Hall's plans. Able to mount successful resistance, the SOMA area stood their ground against City Hall. In the 1980s, however, everything changed with the AIDS crisis. The power to oppose City Hall diminished as the grip of the AIDS epidemic increased on the city's gay, male population. Retreating in the wake of this crisis, the bars and clubs of SOMA lost much of their political autonomy and City Hall's plans for revitalization moved forward. Not wanting to see the neighborhood as its residents knew it disappear, in 1983 the residents organized a street fair to increase visibility of the community, raise funds, and create awareness and education surrounding the AIDS epidemic. Thus, the Folsom Street Fair was born. Today, Folsom continues largely as a community and nonprofit event. Many of the proceeds for the dance parties, the street exhibitions, etc. go to local charities.

As Folsom is the largest leather event in the world, its great visibility and sheer numbers means that it encompasses the broader BDSM community as well. It is more of an exhibitionist and voyeuristic space than IML. The event has grown in magnitude and now seems less squarely focused on men. Despite its more singularly focused beginnings on gay, male, leather subculture, the event is now a panoply of sex and sexuality. Indeed, if one googles 'Folsom Street Fair' many images containing men and women appear and this sheds light on the multiple genders represented at Folsom. Whereas IML has the hotel lobby, Folsom does not have as clearly defined epicenter as IML. Rather, Folsom Street is blocked off from Eighth to around Twelfth Street, and the entire event takes place between those two intersections. Figure 7 shows a map of the event below.



Figure 7 is a generic picture from the internet that depicts a map of Folsom street and where the street fair takes place.

The blocks along Folsom Street are the gathering place of the fair. With throngs of pulsing people, the fair has a Mardi Gras like atmosphere with larger crowds than IML. The crowds sometimes push you in directions you may not want to go. In fact, it can be so crowded that it is sometimes difficult to see exhibitions, much less across the street. The crowded anomie can make certain spaces on the street more intimate. The crowd can be so dense that an exhibition space may not have enough room for many people, or the people watching may shield the exhibition from the rest of the crowd. Thus, while there are many thousands of people in attendance, they are scattered up and down the street.

Instead of a meeting place for friendships and possible sexual encounters, the street is decidedly more of an exhibitionist and voyeuristic space. One gets the sense that you primarily arrive with friends instead of seeking them out. There is public sex, both at the exhibitions and

between on-lookers. In fact, I saw more public sex or sex acts at Folsom than at IML. I attribute this to the fact of the sheer number of people, the variety of spaces, and how it is difficult for anyone to police the street effectively—though nudity is certainly allowed. Nevertheless, there are not rooms to run off to like at IML, meaning that any sexual encounters between onlookers tend to happen quickly and in some cordoned off section of the street. The public, sanctioned sex displays can last anywhere from several minutes to half an hour or longer. They may be floggings, or rope and bondage, or anything you can imagine. Figure 8 shows a man getting flogged.

There are bars and apartments lining the streets and, no doubt, some may escape into those spaces for sex. However, the sex acts I witnessed between onlookers were short-lived.

There are so many booths and demonstrations that sometimes one gets a strong feeling that the event is diffused, even overwhelming. As you meander through the crowd, folks in all kinds of outfits greet and assail you. Giant pandas, dastardly demons, muscular praetorians, and even a demure but scantily clad Dorothy look-alike from the Wizard of Oz, all greet you as you fumble through the throbbing multitude. Below is a picture of a giant panda brigade that lumbered up and down Folsom Street (see Figure 9).



Figure 9 depicts a man leading several chained people in panda costumes. The man in the leather harness is holding the lead end of the chain to which the other pandas are tied.

Here, failing at masculinity, or much of anything for that matter, is less of an issue (if you are not at one of the male-dominated dance floors). Aberration is the order of the day. At best, there is a weak sense of what is 'normal' here. And if there is a sense of what is normal, it is surely to be the most startling, outrageously dressed person you can be. Indeed, this optic feast provides almost more than your eyes can digest. The outrageous is redundant. This, combined with the sometimes-maddening crowd, mean that the event can be an almost schizophrenic occasion.

There are spaces for various fetishes at both events and there is even a space for women and a group for women at Folsom. There are also dance floors, usually at both ends of the fair. As one might expect, these dance floors are dotted mostly with bopping men. Even in the cool temperatures and breezes of a late San Francisco summer, most of these men find it so overwhelmingly hot that they take their shirts off. Of course, it is not always cold, and going shirtless in this space is one method that gay men use to territorialize space; appropriation through disrobing, as it were. Figure 10 shows a picture of the dance floor; the dance floor acts like a node, but mostly for gay men. They return to take stock of newcomers, and then sometimes dive back into the chaos of the street fair having been suffused with the appropriate shot of gay masculinity.



Figure 10 is a picture of one of the dance floors at Folsom. As you can see, it is primarily dominated by men.

I chose these two events as sites for fieldwork because they are events that play a role in the larger national and international leather community, of which Seattle is certainly a part. While one of my respondents (who is prominent in the community in Seattle) notes that, ‘Seattle is different because we are a little isolated,’ it is still impossible to ignore the impact these two

events have on other communities. It is important to note that while Seattle is geographically isolated, in this day of near instant news coverage and social media, events in far off places have more immediacy than ever before. In much the same way that Castells (1996) understands cities as nodes in larger networks, Chicago and San Francisco (and corresponding events) act as nodes of a larger network of the community. Information flows back and forth between smaller cities and communities and these larger cities to produce bodies that are compliant within the larger structure of hyper-masculinity the community promotes. This propagation produces some similarities between communities but also a scattered hyper-masculinity.

Population and Sampling

My population is all the attendees, sponsors, and vendors at IML and Folsom. My sampling technique was non-probability. I first established contacts at the major events and forums of IML and Folsom. I accomplished this by talking to people in Seattle who had connections to these events. From there I used a snowball sample from these contacts to find people that I might not otherwise have considered. Because IML has a sexual overtone, I did not want to be a full participant due to ethical concerns. I also did not participate in public displays of sex. While I am not sure how public sex on my part would affect the integrity of my work, I decided to err on the side of caution. Having said that, a participant-observer at these events should be prepared for sexual acts to occur around them and indeed, be interested in the interplay between sex, sexuality, and gender.

I conducted short interviews (5-10 minutes) with participants and vendors at these events. Through these interviews, I gained a better understanding of how the men and women at these events essentialize masculinity and the normative values that underwrite their conceptualization

of masculinity, leather, sex, sexuality, the body, masculine space, and (to a lesser extent) violence. My 'n' for this group was 11 people at each event, for a total of 22 unrecorded interviews. My criteria for selection were those participants I met through my own experience of participant-observation. I talked to vendors, attendees, and party promoters.

Initially, my strategy for sampling originated with sponsors of events (this would be: phase 1: purposive sample of sponsor events). This proved nearly impossible because many of the sponsors either never returned an email or had no time to meet. Instead, I talked to people as I walked through both places. IML was much more facilitative for talking since the market was not as busy as the street fair at Folsom. Also, the street fair only lasts one day, whereas the market is around for three days, meaning that there was more time to return to the market and talk with vendors. Also, many of the people I spoke to in Seattle, both formally and informally, were involved in one or the other events. For example, I had several respondents who had attended and been contestants in IML. I also had a respondent who knows the organizer of the largest party for Folsom and who has helped organize the party before. All in all, however, IML was a more fruitful place to learn about leather and see how men displayed hyper-masculinity. I attribute this to IML's focus on men and the fact that Folsom is a larger event that is both geographically scattered and spread out, but also concentrated in when it takes place.

Measurement of Themes/Concepts

R1 and R2 concepts: *masculinity, leather, sex, sexuality, the body, masculine space, violence, gender*. By collecting data from my respondents and through my participant-observations, I gained information about *leather, the body, and masculine space*. Interviewees provided information on all the concepts but they were especially useful in the concepts of:

masculinity, sex, sexuality, the body, violence, gender, and hyper-masculinity. My participant-observations were useful for each of my concepts but they were especially useful for: *violence, care, uncare, gender roles, homonormativity, and hyper-masculinity.*

Data collection

I conducted ethnographic interviews with men and women participating at the events and in Seattle's local community. I used unrecorded interviews. I interviewed people who attended and participated in these events back in Seattle as well as at Folsom and IML especially. I did not find anyone who participated in an exhibition at Folsom. Instead, I found people who attended many times, and/or helped organize events like parties. Most of the interviews at these events were informal conversations. I tended not to take notes during the conversation but would write down notes after the conversation ended. Since I wanted the interviews to evolve organically, I let people tell me their story. I did not have a script, but did have in my mind the kinds of topics and concepts I wanted to discuss. Below are examples of the types of questions I asked.

Sample questions and research question addressed

Why have you chosen to attend this event? R1

Do you consider yourself a fan of leather? R1

What is your earliest memory of being involved in, or intrigued by, leather? R1

Do you find anything unique about leather events as opposed to other gay events? R1

How do you think leather events make you feel comfortable, or do they? R1 and R2

How would you define masculinity? R1 and R2

What satisfaction do you derive from attending a leather event? R1

Do you feel the leather community in your hometown is declining, staying the same, or becoming stronger? Why? R1

Do you consider leather events masculine? Hyper-masculine? Why? R1 and R2

How might you behave differently at a leather event than you would in other gay friendly spaces? R1 and R2

Do you see a relationship between leather, masculinity, and sex? Can you explain that relationship? R1 and R2

Do you think your body is an instrument of your sexuality, gender, and masculinity? How so? R1 and R2

Can you describe for me the relationship between sexuality and gender? R1 and R2

Do you see a relationship between masculinity and violence? R1

Have you ever had an important experience that changed or told you how you think about your own gender? R1 and R2

What kind of message do you feel you portray when you wear leather? R1 and R2

Do you feel like your gender stays the same or changes? If it changes, how so? R1 and R2

I also acknowledged that I am a participant in this subculture, which put me rather more on the ‘participant’ end of Gold’s continuum (1958) than the ‘observer’ standpoint. This positionality is beneficial insofar as I could achieve what Weber calls ‘verstehen’ (Swedberg, 2007) with my

research subjects. It may have been detrimental insofar as I did not always have the social and cultural ‘distance’ necessary to interpret cultural norms and significations or place them into broader structural perspectives needed for critical analysis. I will let the reader determine my success or failure on this point based on the subsequent chapters and analysis.

In a more practical vein, the distinction between participant and observer was a difficult one to sustain. I have attended both Folsom and IML twice, first as a complete participant and the second time as a participant-observer. Babbie (2002) discusses the spectrum of complete observer to full participant, noting that most research falls somewhere in between. I vacillated between observation and participation so much that to distinguish between the two was difficult and exhausting. Also, as an academic, I struggle to think of a time when I do not bring to bear some sort of critical lens on my surroundings. Of course, this tendency ebbs and flows, but my affinity for introspection and analysis meant that I was always, simultaneously, an observer and participant.

Initially, I anticipated being closer to complete-observer. My thinking was that because these events have a strong sexual connotation, reporting on these events entails certain personal issues and feelings toward sex (especially as researchers move closer to full-participant) (Nash and Bain 2007). I felt that maintaining a mostly observer status would allow me to keep a distance between my research subjects and me. After the first day of IML, however, I realized that the feminist mantra of ‘the personal is political’ is true. If I wanted to speak more knowledgeably and authentically about my experiences, I needed to experience the events more like a participant. Likewise, as this research is part of what Binnie (2007) calls a ‘geography of the erotic,’ I felt a responsibility to participate and own the experiences I was observing. And

while I do not speak of my sexual encounters as much as Bell or Binnie may desire, I am clearly a member of this community and have a sex positive attitude.

These events occur at one point in time and therefore my analysis is cross-sectional. I took copious field notes and I used the same codes as above to guide me in my field note-taking and in my data analysis. Examples of notes/observations I took include:

What kinds of bodies are present? R1, R2, R3

In what kinds of spaces do these events occur? Public, private? R1

How are these spaces designed? R1, R3

What is advertised in these spaces? R3

What kinds of food and drink are consumed in these spaces? R2, R3

How many acts of aggression occur? R1, R2

How many public sex acts occur? R1 R3

How many people do I see? R1

The point is that in both the participant-observation and interview phases of research, I used the codes derived from my research questions to give me a sense of direction. Having these general categories allowed me to quickly characterize my observations into meaningful chunks of data. Having stated that, neither list of questions nor observations I have listed are meant to be exhaustive. Rather, they are exemplary of the way I have conceptualized and operationalized my research questions into specific codes for the gathering of information.

Ethical concerns

I did not collect personal information on the research subjects in this phase. I noted physical descriptions, but those alone would not be too revealing. I did not ask people's names at these events if I did not already know them. I did not share my field notes with anyone and I kept them in a notebook either on my person or locked in my private room. At times, I would take digital notes on my phone, but these were also protected by my phone's key code. I did not conceal that I was doing research, and often people would ask what I was doing when they saw me taking notes. If someone asked what I was doing, once I explained my research, I encountered no hostility whatsoever. Likewise, while Babbie (2002) notes several reasons why a researcher might want to deceive their subjects, my research did not lend itself to such deception. One reason for this openness aligns with the political goals of the leather community. In other words, while the community is arguably marginalized, many members in the community seek to normalize and authenticate leather/kink spaces through the means of transparency. They endeavor to make what some may call aberrant practices normal through openness and acceptance.

Conclusion

Through my conceptualization and operationalization of my concepts, and through the different phases of my research, I have demonstrated how I systematically—insofar as I sometimes conducted research inductively—completed this project. The combination of longitudinal (interview data) and cross-sectional (interview and participant-observation) analysis allowed me to grasp an historical process and, importantly, a contemporary one. Additionally, my methods allowed me to tackle issues of scale, from the body to the nation, as I examined how

men territorialized their bodies and how they reinforced national networks of friends with familial language and events that transcended the local scale. Combined with performances of hyper-masculinity that link up to homonormativity, I hope the reader will glean new insights into masculinity more generally and hyper-masculinity particularly through my examination of the under-studied spaces of leather.

Geographers specifically and social theorists generally should be interested in a more nuanced understanding of hyper-masculinity. Understanding gender and thus masculinity from an embodiment perspective helps scholars move past the relentless critiques of essentialism and helps shed light on the myriad ways we all essentialize. Understanding masculinity from an embodiment perspective has material effects in the world and it has the potential to change the way researchers design and carry out research projects.

This project also helps the discipline of critical human geography. Part of the gap in the literature is that there is an inadequate definition and conceptualization of hyper-masculinity and a lack in understanding of the relationship between body and discourse. My hope is that re-conceptualizing hyper-masculinity within geography through an examination of the leather community in Seattle (and at IML and Folsom) will give the discipline a new understanding of the spatial performances of hyper-masculinity and how those performances sustain or undermine homonormativity. Additionally, I hope to illuminate geography's ability as a discipline for avant-garde, theoretical, and empirical interventions within the social sciences. Indeed, a more nuanced and placed understanding of hyper-masculinity helps us understand masculinity more clearly. Moreover, as a concept studied by all social sciences, deriving a more nuanced conceptualization of masculinity, based on the embodied experiences of men in the leather community, not only

helps geography's intellectual rigor but all the other social sciences that seriously consider masculinity as a worthwhile object of inquiry.

Chapter 3: Territorializing space: the spatial dynamics of the leather community

There is a lacuna of scholarship concerning the leather community. With notable exceptions (Bean 2004; Weiss 2011; Stein 2012), academics have not discussed the intersection of leather, place, masculinity, and the body. In this chapter, I draw on current trends within geographies of the body (Dyck 1999; Valentine 1999; Bordo 2003; Longhurst, Ho & Johnston 2008; England & Dyck 2011) and from geographies of masculinity (Berg & Longhurst 2003; Connell 2005; Vanderbeck 2005; Henry & Berg 2006; Valentine 2007; Hopkins & Noble 2009) to portray how the gay leather community propagates a certain type of hyper-masculinity that produces the spatial dynamics of the community. This type of hyper-masculinity territorializes space when members perform it. The ways they perform it align with their preconceived notions about hyper-masculinity and I show how those preconceived notions produce the spatial dynamics (in bars, clubs, contests, etc.). As outlined in the introduction, performances of hyper-masculinity are a method the community uses to territorialize space. Other geographers have discussed the territorialization of space (Hansen & Stepputat 2005; Atherton 2009; Valdivia 2009). In this chapter, I describe how the leather community territorializes space through a variety of means: their bodies, their sense of history, and consumerism. These acts of territorialization create a place and subculture that is simultaneously welcoming and exclusionary. Through my analysis, I aim to extend understandings of hyper-masculinity within geography.

The key instrument of the ‘placing’ of the body within the leather community is wearing leather. The events where these men wear leather offer a space to reclaim and redraw the boundaries that circumscribe their image and highly essentialized understanding of masculinity.

As a performance, wearing leather for many of these men is about limiting or granting access to parts of their body (making bodies legible), sexual identity, community and idolizing and idealizing a hyper-masculine, archetype. The men in this community use leather to inscribe discourse(s) upon their body, turning their bodies into largely sexualized places. While gay men using their bodies as sexualized places is nothing new, this act of sexual territorialization is contingent on the successful display of hyper-masculine attributes *specific* to this community. Thus, how these men successfully or unsuccessfully use their bodies as sexual places based on hyper-masculine attributes can tell us something new about conceptualizations of masculinity within geography. Put differently, we learn how these men essentialize hyper-masculinity and this speaks back to the rather open theorization (social contractedness) of masculinity within geography. Specifically, they essentialize this gender type through aggressive displays with their bodies, and especially with their language. They often use terms that they feel are historically and intuitively linked to masculinity. So, they essentialize through what we may call a vague history of what they believe to be a trajectory of masculinity. The blend biological differences they perceive between men and women, though when pressed, they understand that these differences are more perceived than ontological. Nevertheless, they blend that perceived biological difference with an historical difference that together, informs their sense of masculinity. As the community is so reliant on history, it is a solid place from which this type of hyper-masculinity can spring.

My focus in this chapter is on how men use their bodies at events like Folsom, IML, and local events in Seattle. We must also contextualize how consumerism casts a shadow over how these men use their bodies. Additionally, I discuss how members remember history or whether they disavow it. These forces all combine to produce the spatial dynamics of the leather

community. As previously mentioned, IML and Folsom encompass many dimensions of the leather community and participating and observing at these events enabled me to explore the relationships between leather, place, and the body. As I noted in the introduction, there is both a sense of uniformity and diffusion about what is hyper-masculine between Seattle and these larger cities and events. This dual uniformity and diffusion within the community happens through the constant interchange of information about what is sexy and masculine—and this interchange culminates at the contests like IML. In turn, ideas about what is aesthetically pleasing inform how men shape their bodies. These bodies enter the contests at local events and then at the more national events to create a dialectic between the smaller cities and the larger, annual events.

How bodies produce the spatial dynamics of the leather community

Meandering through the leather market at IML in Chicago, I saw a man on all fours wearing a dog mask and a dog tail inside of a dog pen. The booth to his left displayed slings, leather harnesses, and candles that said they are scented like sex (whatever that is supposed to smell like?). Down one aisle, there was a porn booth with a live demonstration involving a man using leather whips on another man in a leather sling. On another aisle, one of the largest leather clothing companies in the United States, ‘Nasty Pig,’ was selling its goods: leather jockstraps, leather armbands, leather shirts, and leather harnesses.

What was particularly striking about the market that day was not the sheer number of bodies, but the number of sexualized and fetishized bodies. Most men were either shirtless or in their own gear, displaying their bodies in what can appropriately be called ‘peacocking.’⁸ Moreover, while there are many displays of what one of my respondent’s calls ‘extreme

⁸ I have heard members in the leather community and even the larger gay community use the term ‘peacocking’ to reference someone who is displaying their body for visual and perhaps carnal consumption.

fetishes,' these performances also serve a disciplining role themselves. In what may be called the governmentality of IML and Folsom, one is urged into wearing gear or displaying parts of their bodies they might not otherwise reveal. Most of my respondents do not see this as a negative. In fact, some respondents claimed to attend these events to liberate themselves from their otherwise mundane lives. Of course, like most liberatory practices, one tends to move from one bounded space to another.

For IML, but especially for Folsom, aberration from conservative dress is the governing norm. Folsom, more than IML is a space that gathers more of these aberrations together in one place. At IML, there is a strong sense that these men have traded the convention of conservative dress for sexualized dress, predicated on leather. At Folsom, the attendees have traded conservative dress for just about anything sexual, including (but not limited to) leather. As such, one is likely to see new trends in sex, sexuality, gear, and kink sex play on display at Folsom on a scale rarely seen anywhere else. This large scale also occurs in part because of the grand diversity that Folsom supports. For IML and the local contests that feed it, there is undoubtedly more concentration of what is acceptable in terms of body type and masculinity. This concentration means that the local contests are less about aberration and more about reifying what has already gained saliency. This reification through the local contests translates to the local communities producing compliant or normed bodies for IML. While there is a two-directional flow between the smaller contests and IML, most contestants look to previous winners at IML from which to emulate or borrow in the hopes of being successful. Local communities, therefore, rely on formal performances at contests, but also performances of a quotidian nature. These daily practices, as well as the more formal practices at the local contests,

sustain the discursive reality of the performances themselves. In turn, the discursive reality provides a context and space for the performances, creating a ceaseless dialectic.

The relationship between the participants, the leather market at IML, and the street fair at Folsom has other dimensions to it as well. As an observer at the market, one becomes accustomed to the performances around them and their spatial dynamics. In turn, one might find themselves participating in certain performances; this encourages others to take part and increases the intensity of the market and street fair as sexually charged spaces. The street fair, however, is more 'staged' (Jagose 1996). It is more of a carnival or theater like space. As Brown (2000) is keen to point out, however, we should be wary of over-determining the priority of the stage or recreating a rigid binary of the stage/audience. Thus, while there is more of an audience feel to the street fair (excluding the staged contest at IML), there is a co-constitutive relationship between the audience and the stage. The stage or theater of performance at Folsom is not a natural setting. The onlookers and the participants both create the stage. Of course, IML and more specifically the contest, contains a clear division between the stage and the audience. At first glance the stage appears to have priority over the audience. The strength of this priority occurs because of the judges who determine the winner. Moreover, judges ask contestants to perform certain looks, put on various outfits, and speak on a range of topics. If we step back and realize, however, that only about 300 people attended the actual contest at IML the year I attended (300 out of 20,000 estimated attendees) one realizes that the contest and thus the stage do not have the sort of dominance that they once did. Instead, meeting spaces like the lobby and sexual encounters in hotel rooms produce aesthetic bodies and masculinity. Therefore, while the contest remains a priority of IML, its supremacy as the main reason for gathering has paled when we consider that many of the attendees do not attend the contest itself. This is not to impugn the

power of the contest or contestants. After all, the contestants mingle in the lobby throughout IML and their appearance is certainly noted and appreciated. Instead, the notion of what is masculine and hyper-masculine occurs through various spaces that are not limited to the staged contest. As fewer and fewer men attend the contest relative to the number attending IML, the power of the contest is diminished.

While scholars have documented the spatial dynamics of gay bars (Castells 1983; Valentine 1994; Brown 2009; Brown et al. 2015), the market and street fair are arguably more public than bars. They are well-lit and full of vendors selling leather products. The street fair, more than the leather market, is a space of alcohol and drug consumption, the latter being more prevalent and out in the open at the street fair. Nevertheless, these are liminal spaces somewhere between the complete consumerism of a store and cruising for a sex partner at a bar. Both function as catchalls for kink and fetish. Puppy play (where people behave like dogs), furies (dressing up like animals), electrocution with nodes, and many other fetishes (like wearing rubber, being wrapped in plastic, wearing gas masks, whipping, etc.) are all performed. The market, street fair, and even local events (not necessarily contests) normalize many types of behaviors, and as Bean (2004) and Stein (2012) note, this normalization leads to a very strong sense of inclusion among different types of people.

This display of sex, sexuality, and fetishes, has a Williams-like structure of feeling (1977). In this case, the predominant feeling is that one can participate and explore most any kind of sexual fetish one desires and with great acceptance. I hesitate, however, to say that there is no or even little judgement; for even in these seemingly non-judgmental spaces, there are still furled eyebrows and the occasional caustic gaze. Put differently, this non-judgmental space still has a set of rules. As long as you play by those rules, you are likely to fit in. Thus, in relation to

my larger point, the spaces of leather can be non-judgmental only insofar as you conform to another set of rules. Therefore, for a community that prides itself on openness and welcoming, it can be just as exclusionary as some of the spaces or structures it aims to critique. In this manner, these spaces can also be intimidating. I recall walking around a leather event in San Francisco with a friend of mine who had never attended a leather event. We walked into the lobby of the hotel and back into the meeting room whereupon he grabbed my arm and said, ‘don’t leave me here alone!’ Contrasting this attitude, one respondent lauded the events because, ‘While everyone might value different types of kink or fetishes, the fact that most are welcome is certainly a hallmark of the community.’

The valuing of these different types of kink also leads to greater body diversity both in how men shape their bodies and how they adorn their bodies with gear. Thus, while muscular bodies are arguably still the most celebrated body type at these events, skinnier, hairless (smooth), and bodies in costume are also celebrated and welcomed at these events. Spatially, it is not surprising that many of the people into the same fetish (and thus body adornment) tend to group together at these events. However, one would witness men and (and to a much smaller degree at IML, women) of all body shapes and sizes mixing in a somewhat crowded anomic. Having said this, one would also realize that even amid this body diversity, there is still a strong hegemonic male, body aesthetic that promotes muscularity, and to a slightly lesser extent facial hair and tattoos (Filiault & Drummond 2007). Figure 1 below is a picture of the hotel lobby at night. It shows the same type of grouping of men who either know each other or have the same aesthetic. The below picture is from a subsequent IML I attended, after I had completed my formal fieldwork. In this picture, we see how men tend to group at these events.



Figure 11 is a picture of one of the host hotel lobbies at IML in 2013.

This lobby was smaller but also had spaces up above from which to perch and watch. There is obviously some diversity of body type here. Men moved around from circle to circle and the room shifted and morphed. There usually were not spaces where the same men would congregate. Instead, I remember joking with a friend and saying, ‘where is muscle bear island today?’ In other words, while many of the men I call *muscle bears* tend to stick together, their group migrated around the room. There is confidence in numbers.

Previously I mentioned that there was only limited public sex at IML. At this IML and in this lobby, however, because of the catwalk upstairs and the bathrooms that had numerous stalls, there was more public sex. Indeed, most of the time I entered the bathrooms on the catwalk, I either saw or heard sex/sexual acts taking place in bathroom stalls. Obviously, the desire or

willingness for quasi-public sex (I say quasi because it was behind a closed door in a bathroom, and then inside of stalls) is there, but the spatial arrangement of certain lobbies makes public sex difficult at other host hotels. I also attribute this sexual frequency because at IML, most of my respondents said they attend because they want to: see friends, have a safe place to wear their gear, and have sex. I am paraphrasing here, as some of my respondents noted other reasons, though nearly all explicitly or implicitly denoted a desire for sex. Sometimes they spoke in slightly coded language about sex. For example, one respondent said he liked attending IML because he liked, 'meeting new people.' When I pushed him a little bit about what he meant when he said that, he admitted he mostly meant having sex.

At any rate, the relative lack of racial diversity, i.e. the events being populated by mostly white men, plays into larger critiques of gay bars. Many critics of gay culture in general (and gay bars and leather places, in particular) claim that gay bars and by extension places of leather (like IML) are homonormative, classist, racist, sexist places that are primarily concerned with sexual gratification and drugs (Valentine 1994; Rushbrook 2002; Bell & Binnie 2004; Duggan 2003; Johnson & Samdahl 2005; Caluya 2008; Brown 2009; Browne & Bakshi 2011). In contrast, some scholars (Brown et al. 2015) have argued that gay bars are also places of care. The spaces of leather I have been discussing are no exception. They are both spaces of care and they are homonormative. While the market at IML is delimiting, it does allow for some diversity. So much of what is on display or for sale at the market, however, is geared towards the male body, rendering the space dominantly masculine. At the local scale, contests and gatherings are usually male-oriented as well, though there are women who actively participate in Seattle's leather community and events. This privileging of masculinity and male bodies is not altogether a bad characteristic of these events as women do have their own spaces and organizations (like Seattle

Women in Leather). Moreover, some of the men to whom I spoke both implicitly and explicitly expressed their strong preference for masculine spaces. Reasons for this preference ranged from the ease of finding a sex partner to, as one respondent quipped, ‘a place where men can be men.’ I take this last statement to relate to my earlier point about a historical notion of what it means to be a man. It is a romanticizing of the past to make space for behavior in the present. Whether men really behaved the way that my respondents tend to think is less relevant than what they claimed to be true. These claims to truth justified their current understandings of hyper-masculinity.

More than just adornment or decoration, leather’s placement on the body can signal one’s sexual mood and preferences to others. In this manner, leather renders the individual body legible. This small-scale legibility can serve to alienate or inculcate individuals to each other and then to groups. One might walk through the market or street fair wearing one’s favorite leather. You may notice someone who is not compatible to you because of the placement and style of their leather. Compatibility is denoted by where you wear your leather. For example, Figure 12 below depicts a leather armband. Still legibility does not necessarily connote compatibility—it can mean acceptance into the group, a fraternal bond, or even a shared politics of identity. Thus, while leather is certainly about making the body a legible sexual place, it is also about making it a legible political space.



Figure 12 is a picture of an armband I have. It snaps on with the buttons over your bicep. Blue and white mean fucking and cum respectively. If you wear this on your right arm, you are signaling that you want to bottom. The left signals you want to top.

You wear this armband by placing it around your bicep and snapping it on. If you wear it on your right arm, it means you are a bottom (or wanting to bottom). If you wear it on your left arm, it signifies you are a Top (or wanting to Top). Thus, someone wearing an arm band around their left arm may be attracted to someone wearing an arm band around their right arm. You can even signal a type of fetish you like. For example, the blue color in the above Figure denotes ‘fucking.’ If it was yellow, that would mean water sports (aka piss play).

In this visualized manner, the market, street fair, and local gatherings can be ostracizing, highly territorialized, and disciplining. The subculture of leather spaces generally urges you to

express yourself assertively—especially in a sexual manner—where you can relatively easily transcend boundaries rigidly etched in other public spaces. For example, I took my shirt off, wore all of my gear at IML, and was much more sexually open. Aside from key moments in Seattle, like Pride, I rarely behave with such delightful abandon. No doubt, part of this abandon is because I am ‘out of town’ and not around many people I see daily. We should also understand that when I say abandon, I am signifying a general release of comportment. For me, it is a letting go of the social bonds that dictate my everyday life. While leather spaces may be about rules and regulations (and a sense of history that accompanies those), they are also about letting go of other rules and regulations. However, I have been to out-of-town gay bars and do not usually behave as freely as I did at IML or at Folsom.

As I have mentioned earlier, however, there is still a sense of false liberation, especially if liberation denotes absolute freedom. Instead, it is probably more appropriate to think of these spaces as sexually free spaces, but this freedom is more easily garnered by men, and then by men who are physically fit. Thus, these spaces are both welcoming and simultaneously exclusive. When I asked one respondent about this simultaneous welcoming and ostracizing tendency of leather spaces, he responded with:

I would say the community as a whole is, yes...accepting. I think there are individuals in the community that get a little uppity. So, kind of... If you're a new person coming in, wherever your entry point is you may have a different reaction from people...Not just women but I mean every form of gender you can think of. So socially when there's not necessarily play going on, I mean you'll have every... There's a spectrum again. You go from male to female and everything in between. Wherever or whoever you identify as on that line is represented and welcome at most social functions.

While I find solace in the above statement, based on my observations, I question the extent to which that representation and welcoming atmosphere are true, especially for the market

at IML. Put differently, muscles make the man in leather spaces, and an attractive man has greater social (and sexual) capital (Bourdieu 2007). This is not to reduce the entire community to being all about muscles. Attitude, confidence, and sexual openness all have importance in the community. And while I did not speak to anyone that was not attracted to muscles, I did find some who admired other qualities more than muscular men—most notably attitude and confidence. Nevertheless, for a community that celebrates hyper-masculine men where muscles are at the core of that concept, it is not surprise that muscular men have more success, at least sexually, than others.

Gender also plays a role in social acceptance—though again, we should not reduce acceptance to merely gender. Indeed, at the busiest times in the host hotel lobby, there were hundreds of (usually shirtless) men and very few women. It is also easy to discern how certain men move more easily through the room, sometimes receive drinks quicker from bar tenders, and generally receive more attention. There are of course exceptions, and not everyone finds muscular men attractive. According to most of my respondents, and from what I observed, however, men with body types that fit stereotypes focused on blue collar labor, along with gym culture, appeared to have a certain charismatic cache that other men did not.

This type of celebration of blue collar labor is also a form of class condescension. These, mostly affluent men, go out of their way to try and embody blue collar bodies to appear non-wealthy. Wearing the right clothes and shaping your body in muscular, labored look—especially given that you are not achieving either through blue collar work—signals that class hierarchies are strong within the community. When I think of some of the men who try to accomplish this blue collar look, but then undermine it with expensive jewelry from Tiffany (I saw one man at IML with a Tiffany charm around his neck), the look becomes inauthentic. And here we find

ourselves at a question of authenticity. To appear authentic, these men condescend to appear blue color, but in so doing, they betray their middle or upper-class origins.

This type of latitude for the hyper-masculine body aesthetic is perhaps not surprising. It remains, however, a paradox of the community. For a community that is concerned with anti-heteronormative politics, the popular spaces of leather, whether they are on the national scale or the local scale, are not overly inclusive when it comes to gender, transgender folks, or non-hyper-masculine performances of gender. Mangan (1999) deems this exclusiveness the masculine culture of beauty and Goltz (2007) calls it the hegemonic male aesthetic. Beyond these non-geographical depictions of hyper-masculinity, what is surprising is that geographers have not adequately theorized hyper-masculinity as it relates to the body. With few exceptions, notably Bell et.al. (1994), geographers have tended to use the term *hyper-masculine/hyper-masculinity* monolithically. I will squarely address this dearth of scholarship within geography in the next chapter. What I want to emphasize here is that my research demonstrates, especially if we compare it to other work on hyper-masculinity, that there is variation in what it means to be hyper-masculine. Indeed, for the leather community, hyper-masculinity is about appropriating the exaggerated features of extreme muscle, tattoos, facial hair, and other attributes I listed in my methodology section. For Bell et al. (1994), however, hyper-masculinity has something to do with the body, but they do not articulate very clearly what those attributes and features are. Both their conception of hyper-masculinity and mine rely on the understanding that these largely sexual identities are ‘sexual-outlaw styles’ (Bell et al. 1994, p. 31). But this is where the similarities end. Part of the issue is that the leather community occupies a larger space of the gay community than the skinhead community mentioned in Bell. et. al. (1994) (especially now as the skinhead community is drastically smaller). And as I have mentioned, the borders of the leather

community are porous, so folks move in and out freely. This movement means that folks can be part of the community in one moment, and then largely disavow it in another. Thus, the displaying of hyper-masculine bodies in the leather community is about granting sexual access and coding space as sexualized and homosexual for immediate gratification. Like many of the appropriations of space, the leather community's is temporary and incursive. What is important is that hyper-masculine bodies specific to that community are largely responsible for territorializing otherwise heterosexual space for largely sexual interactions. If we continue to use 'hyper-masculinity' in too general a way, we run the risk of missing the nuances of the relationship of hyper-masculine bodies and how those bodies particularly code space.

Of interest is that the community privileges white, muscular bodies. In Seattle, I noticed more acceptance for body type diversity, if those bodies were able-bodied (I will take up this issue in greater detail at the end of the chapter). As Seattle is mostly a racially white city, white bodies still dominate. Speculatively, this greater diversity is probably due to several factors. First, many of the participants at local gatherings are more comfortable in local spaces. They know each other and have had time to forge friendships. Members see many of the same people repeatedly and this fosters familiarity even with people one may not speak to regularly. In turn, this familiarity entices folks who otherwise may stay at home and certainly avoid national events to attend local gatherings and feel comfortable displaying their bodies. Finally, at local gatherings like SML socials, there is simply not a large concentration of men who fit into the hegemonic male aesthetic like there are at national events.

While Seattle may be slightly more accepting of a range of body types, along with a hegemonic male aesthetic, the concept of homonormativity is also at play here. Duggan (2003) describes homonormativity as 'discursive and socio-material practices articulated by gays and

lesbians that support rather than resist heteronormative, neoliberal projects (p. 50).’ Although she may not use the specific phrase, homonormative body types, this notion comports with her description of homonormativity. Furthermore, the national events certainly have a concentration of this body type over local events and this concentration has its own disciplining tendencies.

Perhaps one of my respondents put it best when he said:

So, say you have a group of 30 leather men. Maybe three of them again have this sort of like really strict requirements of how they’re going to accept you. The rest of them are going to be open arms and be fine. But if you happen to encounter one of those people first you may get a reaction that’s like, “oh my God the leather community is awful you know?” Because they tend to be very vocal.

When I asked what the strict requirements were, the respondent noted several traits, claiming that, ‘having a good body would be a good place to start.’ He also explained that how long one was involved in the community mattered to certain members and how often one wears leather was also important. For this respondent, those most wary of accepting folks, those ‘three of them’ as he stated, are also the members that are usually the most involved and have been for many years. These Old Guard members tend to have strict rules of dress and comportment. Whether you have and wear the correct type of leather, and whether you are behaving in non-ostentatious ways, matters. For others, being physically fit especially if you embody many of the attributes of hyper-masculinity, can undo leather faux pas, so to speak.

The above quote also highlights the contradictory nature of the leather community with its simultaneously welcoming and potentially ostracizing tendencies. As Joseph (2002) points out, communities are not always the shining beacon of acceptance that the left often claims they are. Like gay bars, communities can be exclusionary, ostracizing, and delimiting. And for all its progressive sexual politics, the community willfully embodies this contradictory tendency. And

while body type (and to a lesser degree, race and gender) underwrites this ambivalence between welcoming and exclusion, there is another dimension of the community at work. The exclusive tendencies of the leather community rest on a division between the Old Guard and the New Guard (traditional versus non-traditional). How one person versus another has territorialized their body as an object of desire or an object off-limits based on the traditions (or a defiance of the traditions) of the community, renders certain bodies legible and acceptable.

Old Guard/New Guard: How conceptions of history produce the spatial dynamics of the leather community

While each of the events about which I have been speaking celebrate leather, hyper-masculinity, pageantry, and sexual gratification in one place, none do it on such a grand, formal scale as IML. The participants at IML value the above traits and convene publicly to demonstrate this shared sense of community (the local contests here in Seattle are fashioned, more or less, in the same manner as the larger contest at IML, so they function in a similar way). Many of the attendees at IML have formed national and international networks of friendships and many of the attendees from Seattle use IML as a place to reconnect with those friends. One respondent noted, ‘Often I only see people at IML that I don’t see anywhere else throughout the year. It’s a gathering place, a meeting place and that is what I mostly use it for now.’ While many of my respondents spoke fondly of their experiences at IML, others lamented the changes they see in the community. Some of the respondents claimed that the true history of IML has been changed or lost and that the original purpose for the event has been lost in the swirl of partying, drinking, sex, and drugs. One respondent claimed:

IML is an interesting situation. For example, it started off as a contest with this little party thrown in afterwards on the weekend so these guys could get together and have a good time. It was a bar contest. And as it progressed it became, in the 35 years that it's been in

existence, it's become less about the contest and more about the party. So even though this year there's probably going to be over 20,000 men in Chicago strictly for this event, I would say 200 or 300 of them will actually go to the contest.

One stark difference between IML and the contests and gatherings in Seattle's community is Seattle's apparent lack of overt drug use and partying. To be clear, there is definitely drug use within the community in Seattle, but it does not happen at the same visible scope as at national events. By drug use I mean mostly those drugs that are associated with dance parties and sometimes with bathhouses, including cocaine, ecstasy, G⁹, and maybe methamphetamines. This drug use and partying is seen by many as part and parcel of the erasure of history. In other words, once the scope of the events changed from remembrance and homage to partying, the history faded in the wake of partying and drug use. A change in scale accompanied this change in history and increase in drug use at the national scale. As IML grew, the number of attendees who were not leather purists, members of the New Guard, grew disproportionately in comparison to the Old Guard. Thus, IML became more circuit party oriented, and less focused on the leather contest. As scholars have noted, circuit parties have high rates of drug use (see especially O'Byrne 2009, but also Field 1993; Valentine 1994; Butler 1999; Bell & Binnie 2004; Johnson & Samdahl 2005). If we add to this mixture the attraction that many men feel toward the hyper-masculine, leather aesthetic, it is not surprising that there are many men using drugs while attending IML. Locally, Seattle's community does not celebrate the circuit party subculture. In fact, many in the community are in recovery. Moreover, several leather contestants from Seattle who participated at IML have made drug addiction and recovery

⁹ G, also known as GHB, stands for gamma-hydroxybutanoic acid. It is a naturally occurring neurotransmitter and a psychoactive drug. Chemically closely related to GABA, it acts on the GABA receptor and on the GHB receptor. In large enough quantities, many claim that it has intoxicating and sexually pleasurable effects. It is also dangerous if mixed with alcohol and has the potential to be fatal. Because of its alleged sexual benefits and no side-effects, like a hangover, many gay men use it in place of alcohol.

part of their platform. In this way, drug use is more prominent nationally than at the local, Seattle scale. Thus, the scale and scope of IML has changed since its origins, and drug use has accompanied this change. In turn, these spatial changes accompany a change in the way folks attending IML (and in the leather community) appreciate history. Put differently, if your goal is to have a good time and celebrate the moment through sexualized interactions punctuated with drug use, then history can get in your way.

To be clear, the accompanied drug use is somewhat incidental, but it relates to hyper-masculinity. Drug use is often associated with hedonism and that is often associated with hyper-musicality. The reckless abandon and animalistic desire are often viewed as intrinsically hyper-masculine and drug use can unlock this intrinsic quality. Yet, there are many in the community in recovery and consider it just as masculine to abstain from drug use. Thus, while drug use is related to hyper-masculinity within the community, its use and abstention both reinforce conceptualizations of hyper-masculinity. It is not the cause of the changes IML has seen in scale and scope—it is an effect of those changes. Nor is drug use the lone culprit for the erasure or devaluing of history. Instead we should understand the increased drug use as part of a larger phenomenon of gay, male culture. Nevertheless, we must also understand that Old Guard members argue that the increased drug use dilutes the purpose of IML. And while the above quote laments the increasing amount of drug use and how this has affected IML, members in Seattle's community did not speak of a similar trend at the local scale. Instead, when I asked the above respondent about the integrity of the local contests, alcohol consumption, and drug use, he replied, 'it certainly goes on here, but it's more behind the scene and not out in the open. Plus, Seattle has a large number of members in recovery who care about addiction or alcohol abuse.' In keeping with this theme, the various contests in Seattle that I attended had most members

squarely focused on the contest. Even informal gatherings had a more unified feeling to them than IML and certainly more than the Folsom street fair; though this phenomenon is in part because of the scale of the events.

Conceptions of history within the community revolve around a mythologizing (or disregarding) of leather history, both nationally and locally. When I asked people if they knew how long the contest at IML or Folsom had been in existence or how it started, very few gave me a coherent answer. Instead, if they did offer an answer, they gave me answers that contradicted each other. The answers I received also seemed to correspond with what the person most liked about the community. There were some of my respondents that had keen and accurate knowledge of the local history and could tell me where and when bars first opened, and past winners of events. Still, there was a common theme of historical ignorance, or the recasting of history concerning tradition within the community at all scales. This ignorance or recasting of history allows both national and local events to function epiphenomenally as throngs of people lusting for immediate gratification piggyback on the cultural and historical work that the harbingers of tradition strive so diligently to maintain. This immediacy and disdain for etiology, loosely cast as the New Guard tradition, is in deep contrast to the traditions and rules of the Old Guard. For example, this division played out in those who identify as Old Guard or New Guard. None of the members for whom I have recorded interviews identified as New Guard. In fact, no one identified as New Guard. Instead, New Guard always seemed to be a relative concept, and sometimes an insult. Relatively speaking, men who were heavily involved, long term members of the community, tended to use 'New Guard' as way to define their own identity and standing within the community (i.e., they defined themselves as distinctly *not* New Guard). Thus, New Guard was a way for members to 'other' men they believed did not embody the legacy of leather

history in an appropriate way. For these members, embodying the history of the community meant: wearing leather every day, having intimate knowledge of local and national histories, and knowing other members within the local community that had been active for many years. In this manner, New Guard members were always present, but never quite the same in different spaces because what constituted New Guard changed depending on who was speaking. At IML, New Guard had a looser definition, and frankly I only heard the term mentioned at the contest. At Folsom, New Guard did not figure into any of my respondents' stories or language. New Guard had the most clearly articulated meaning locally, and it typically meant anyone not involved or present at most of the social events.

Cultural geographers have also noted how nostalgia can render spaces and histories as mythic (Mitchell 1996; Delyser 2008). In this way, contests especially function as key cultural guardians of the leather community's tenets for those who value the history. In turn, they are spaces where men can perform hyper-masculinity (on and off the stage) and transmit the cultural significance of these performances to an audience. Conversely, the contests also operate as spaces where participants bask in the ephemera of sexual encounters that might be spiked with alcohol or drugs—especially at Folsom and IML. These sexual encounters are also spaces where men suffuse their sense of hyper-masculinity through sex, potentially with other hyper-masculine men, thereby validating their own sense of masculinity. Ironically, IML and Folsom, as events that were specifically designed to commemorate and celebrate the history and legacy of the leather community, are also where that history is actively ignored, if not erased. Thus, men celebrate and reinforce hyper-masculinity through sexual encounters and attendance at the events, and simultaneously historical notions of hyper-masculinity are being erased through the marginalization of the significance of the contests.

While some of my respondents lamented the changing nature of the national events, some in the community, however, saw no need to revere that history. One respondent noted:

Hey, history is great but I'm not going to...I refuse to be stuck in this kind of historical, you know, archetype that I don't care about...I appreciate whoever it was that started it or wherever it came from, or when it began — that's great, I'm glad it happened — but that was then.

For this respondent, acceptance into the leather community or participation at IML rested on different criteria than knowledge of history. His New Guard attitude is at odds with the Old Guard mentality.¹⁰ The Old Guard members tend to be older folks who guard and transmit the history of the community—the border patrol of the leather community. I analogize this knowledge of history for the community to the way states require new citizens to accumulate and demonstrate the history and traditions of their new state (Adams 1995; Hansen & Steputat 2005). In other words, the Old Guard functions as cultural police—granting access to the community based on a shared and embraced history of the leather community. Policing the traditional and historical borders of the community is one method that the Old Guard utilizes to territorialize space.

The Old Guard implicitly values embodied knowledge. Bordo (2003) and Irigaray and Marion (2003) aver that place underwrites embodiment and embodied knowledge has to do with location within networks, lived experience, sensuality, and sexual difference. Likewise, men place themselves in the community in part based on how active or inactive they are when it comes to wearing leather or what might be called a *location within the leather network*. For example, when I asked many of my respondents how often they ‘do’ leather, many responded:

¹⁰ The “Old Guard” and the “New Guard” are terms people in the leather community use to refer to people who are concerned or not so concerned with the traditions, customs and history of the leather community.

‘every day.’ This response is typical for the Old Guard and active members. For these respondents, wearing leather is not something one dons for special events—taken out of the closet and then hung back up again. Even if they are not wearing something made from leather, many of the respondents speak of leather as a mindset—what Filiault and Drummond (2007) call an attitude. When I asked one of my respondents if he wore something leather every day he said,

Not necessarily something every day. My leather is more of an internal leather. Like my thinking, my thought process, my way of looking at things goes that way...So when I say I do it every day, I do... It’s part of my life every day. It’s not necessarily a piece of leather but there is an aspect of it every day.

As this response suggests, leather is as much a mindset as it is a material reality. When I asked this respondent what he meant by ‘internal leather,’ he said, ‘you know...just that I am part of the community, that I carry myself with confidence, that I wear tight jeans, that I have something to do with leather on my mind always. I have manners.’ As self-admittedly part of the Old Guard, this member also expressed fealty for traditions and following the rules as part of his ‘internal leather.’ And while the Old Guard might have established the rules for membership arduousness, the New Guard pays little attention to these regulations. Interestingly, for some members there is a strong tension between the old and new—a tension usually espoused by Old Guard members but rarely by New Guard members. Thus, while this tension obviously exists, as one respondent noted most of the members, ‘can do their own thing, you know. And if the Old Guard suits you, you do it; and if it doesn't, you don't do it. And most of the community is in the middle somewhere.’

Performances of hyper-masculinity

The contests also privilege a certain flavor of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005; Filiault & Drummond 2007) that, as I have been arguing, is largely based on the indicators I outlined in my conceptual breakdown of hyper-masculinity. Moreover, many of my respondents use the term *hyper-masculine* to denote that not only do they privilege masculinity but they value a macho form of it. However, the particularities of hyper-masculinity have specific meanings in the leather community than in other geographers' use of the term (Bell et al. 1994; Vanderbeck 2005). Filiault and Drummond (2007) describe the 'macho man' look as broad and hairy chested, bulging muscles, bulging pelvic regions, wearing working-class clothes, and bodies indicative of the use of supplements or even steroids. The celebration of supplements and even steroids is ironic in that we can argue that it is not authentic—a hallmark of hyper-masculinity. In other words, while authenticity is important to establishing yourself as hyper-masculine, if you take drugs to achieve that look, then how authentic are you? This description closely aligns with performances of hyper-masculinity I witnessed. They also describe the macho attitude as stoic, strong, and even misogynistic. Filiault and Drummond's description of the macho male corresponds with my respondent's descriptions. When I asked one respondent to describe what made men in the community hyper-masculine, he responded with:

The uniform of the United States Marines is hyper-masculine. It makes a guy look extremely male. The cut of the outfit, the adornments, the hat, the rigidity is a very masculine look. At the same time and not to sound like I am being racist or bigoted but the Nazi uniform was extremely sexual in appearance. A lot of people would not necessarily agree with that because of whatever, whatever but their outfits that they were dressed in were extremely, extremely masculine...So it also has a sense of like hyper-masculinity plus it also feeds off of a lot of visual stimulus that gay men have seen in the past: Tom of Finland, AMG, Athletic Models Guild, anything that is, anything that represents something like Rough Trade, anything that accentuates body shape.¹¹

¹¹ Tom of Finland, AMG, and Athletic Models Guild are all Magazines and art forms that depict men in the larger gay community. These depictions conform to the physical attributes my respondents use describe hyper-masculinity and are often a source of inspiration for members in the community.

This description underpins how numerous attendees define hyper-masculine in essentialized terms, based largely on bodily appearance. Geographers and other social scientists are careful not to essentialize; instead, they define gender and masculinity in relational terms (Longhurst 2000; Berg & Longhurst 2003; Simpson 2004; Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Aitken 2006; Atherton 2009; Hopkins 2009). Moreover, while men and women active in the leather community certainly essentialize masculinity when they describe it, scholars illustrate my point concerning the difficulty of defining hyper-masculinity (notably Bell et al. 1994; Vanderbeck 2005; Filiault & Drummond 2007). Although none of these scholars explicitly define hyper-masculine they have articulated how men construct, maintain, and challenge masculinities and how masculine ideals change over time.

In Chapter 4, I take up the concept of hyper-masculinity in more detail, but for our purposes here Goltz's (2007) definition of hyper-masculinity and those traits articulated by my respondents suffices.

a masculinity (in terms of the H-MQ) that is rooted in traditional masculine characteristics of hierarchy, antifemininity, and dominance... As a minority masculinity, the H-MQ presents a complex construction of masculinity that is both excessive, potentially resistant, and queer, while still located within the (assumed White) male middle-class body and defined through aggression, authority, and domination. (Goltz 2007, p. 110)

This definition relates back to my tables in chapter two because it articulates many of the attributes and indicators I witnessed, like: attractiveness, aggressive sexual display, attitude, confidence, swagger, and muscularity. The attendees of contests and especially those participants to whom I spoke had less of a problem defining hyper-masculinity; still, I noticed a level of

uneasiness in nearly all my respondents about the term. Perhaps they, too, realized that once we start to define masculinity in absolute terms, instead of the poststructuralist tendency toward relational terms (see Sayer 1997), the definition fails. As Sayer (1997) contends, however, if we are to explain anything, then some measure of ‘non-deterministic essentialism’ is necessary—otherwise gender is an evanescent concept. Therefore, when we use the term *hyper-masculine* it is necessary to discuss how some of the elements the term implies are potentially deterministic—in this case, body type especially. Conversely, whereas terms like *hyper-masculine* may be useful, it is important to define them and maintain that their use does not foreclose other epistemologies of masculinity. Goltz’s (2007) definition works well for my research because it most closely matches the indicators for hyper-masculinity (when it comes to the dimensions of body and attitude) that my respondents articulated and my observations supported.

The reticence of my respondents to define hyper-masculinity, paired with the lack of a definition in geography, demonstrate at least a nascent understanding that the use of such a term imperils alternative epistemologies of masculinity. Nevertheless, within the leather community, the term strongly relates to positivist or normative conceptions concerning body type. Real men should be muscular and aggressive and should display these traits through their bodies especially. For the men in this community, the notion that hyper-masculinity is a social construction has almost no traction. The Old Guard, through its celebration of historical tropes of hyper-masculinity stemming from the military and bike clubs provides a firm, apparently natural foundation from which they sustain the ideal of hyper-masculinity. Yet in these poststructuralist times where we understand gender as socially constructed and there is greater acceptance for gender types, this community stands at the crossroads of masculinity being a monolithic,

essentialized trait and gender being a changing, amorphous concept that defies rigid characterization.

We also should remember that, even though Goltz's (2007) definition encompasses much of what it means to be hyper-masculine within the leather community, there are aspects of hyper-masculinity that are not included. Particularly absent are understandings of history (i.e., the divide between the Old Guard and New Guard) to communities and how those understandings play into performances of hyper-masculinity. Also absent is an ethic of care specific to the leather community. I take up the concept of care in Chapter 5, but for our purposes here, it is important to remember that no generic definition can encompass all features and attributes of hyper-masculinity for all communities that embody and celebrate this concept.

Where is all the sex? Public sex and the corporate appropriation of leather events

Leather contests are about celebration and commemoration. They are not primarily a place for political rallying, although the events *are* saturated with politics. While the concept of 'pride' is present at contests, based on my observations, most attendees at national events are concerned with enjoying the experience and sexual gratification—but only in the appropriate space. Thus, the street fair in Folsom, while apparently about sex, has very little sex occurring that is not part of an official demonstration. To have sex or engage in sexual acts, you must go to private spaces, like a hotel room, bathhouse, or a dark corner of one of the dance party event spaces. Local events, depending on whether they are contests or gatherings/socials have a stronger milieu of social cohesion and common purpose, but they too have only a robust undertone of sexual gratification.

The lack of an overt political agenda associated with public sex renders these spaces rife for easy corporatization. I understand corporatization as a society where: ‘Rights are refigured as corporate rights, freedoms as corporate freedoms and even apparatuses of security are aimed at corporations (‘corporate welfare’). The free, well-functioning society is one composed of corporations, whether of one or many individuals, and operating according to corporate logic (Hardin, 2012, p.215).’ This corporatization is especially true at the national gatherings that rely on sponsors to help fund events. These events continue to have non-traditional sponsors, but they are increasingly marked with corporate sponsors. The result is a mish-mash of corporate sponsors and unconventional sponsors. See Figures 14, 15, and 16 below for some of the images of Folsom sponsors.





Figure 13

Figure 13 depicts a sampling of brads, all three of which advertise at Folsom.

As with many gay pride parades, one acquires a sense that corporate sponsors have appropriated IML and Folsom. Even institutions like Mr. S. Leather have a corporate feel to them now as they have become world famous. None of this is to say that corporatization is all harmful. Instead, the appearance and acceptance of these corporate sponsors stands in contrast to the original purpose of Folsom. As a festival whose original purpose was to resist the so-called forces of revitalization, the incorporation of companies that have played roles in the forces of global capitalism (where revitalization and gentrification are certainly values inherent in capitalist discourses of development) is at best an occlusion of the history of Folsom.

The outrageous success of Folsom makes for strange bedfellows. Investment companies like Charles Schwab, hotel chains like Marriott, as well as bathhouse chains like Steamworks, sponsor this ostensibly counter-culture event. Marinucci (2013) writes in the San Francisco Chronicle that the Marriott Marquis, a San Francisco-based hotel part of the larger Marriott corporation run by a Mormon family, has publicly supported and sponsored Folsom. This support came in the wake of the Mormon Church's strong support of Proposition 8 in California

that outlawed same-sex marriage. Still, the president of the hotel insists that sponsoring the event is the ‘right thing to do’ in a city that values diversity (Marinucci 2013). But just what kind of diversity does Folsom now celebrate? Marinucci argues that the event is watered-down; and the appearance of corporate sponsorships is partly to blame. Thus, large multinational corporations are now underwriting and sponsoring this event, which is supposed to be radical and transgressive (of gender and sexuality- but not of capitalism) but the effect is that the transgression of sexuality and gender is now losing its edge.

notions of consumerism increasingly underwrite diversity instead notions of sexuality. The presence of Marriott and other similar sponsors, moreover, have accompanied a mainstreaming of the event. As many of my respondents noted, they are not as fond of Folsom as they were in years past. One respondent even noted that while there are still public sex displays in sanctioned areas, sex in the vendor areas has stopped. The fair organizers have cracked down on unsanctioned sexual displays—something Folsom used to celebrate.

The welcoming and relative acceptance of corporate sponsors points to an increasing neoliberalization of these events—especially Folsom. As Puar (2002) notes, homonormative nationalism is a ‘new neoliberal sexual politics that hinges on the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.’ At Folsom, this anchoring in domesticity mostly takes on the appearance of parents with their children. To be sure, there are not many children at this event, but the presence of any suggests that the event has changed, especially when most of my respondents said they did not see children when the event first started. We see this type of demobilization at Folsom. As private sponsors have moved in on the street fair, Folsom is becoming more consumer-driven and less political. The radicalness of what was once a repudiation and protest of development

and gentrification has turned into a diet-radicalness where long beer lines and gratuitous, but only sanctioned, sex displays predominate. The presence of corporate sponsors reflects capitalism's ability to subsume the radical, incorporate the opposition, and to make consumption a primary mechanism of citizenship. At Folsom, the moorings of sexual citizenship, once so prevalent in the fair's gritty origins, are now replaced by domestic and consumer-driven notions of citizenship. Indeed, at one time, Folsom offered a space for the reconceptualization of citizenship along sexual lines. But as geographers have chronicled elsewhere (Marston 1998; Kitchin and Lysaght 2003), the opportunities to revamp and expand notions of citizenship along sexual grounds are usually lost in the wake of recasting those very opportunities into the larger capitalist structure, thus sapping these opportunities of any real political teeth. What remains are events like Folsom that have the veneer of radicalness but are increasingly devoid of any ability for political change.

The increase in consumerism at Folsom affects performances of hyper-masculinity in several ways. First, it dilutes what it means to be hyper-masculine. Folsom used to be a street fair that was raunchy and prided itself on, among other things, displays of public sex. Now, participants' (including men's) ability to consume is a larger part of the event than it used to be. In the mid-1980s, when Folsom started, men tended to wear leather that was passed down to them. Now, many men also use leather as a fashion accessory. As one respondent who has attended Folsom for decades noted, 'I see a lot of different types of leather...more than I used to see. We always had different colors but I see more guys wearing more colors than before.' Thus, for many Old Guard members, pieces of leather were primarily meant to accentuate a man's body—in all its essentialized glory. Now, pieces of leather are still meant to accentuate a man's body but they also bedazzle, demonstrating one's fashion sense. The fact that some men do not know the color

code now, and wear colored leather simply because they like the color, also points to the dilution of hyper-masculinity. Put differently, Old Guard members would only wear leather that clearly reflected their sexual interests, not because they like the color. For them, their sexuality is bound up with hyper-masculinity because being a man also means being sexual, even aggressively sexual. Not knowing the color code demonstrates ignorance of the rules and possible indifference toward sex and kink. In a community predicated on sex and kink, such ignorance is nearly intolerable for some.

The presence of corporate sponsors also legitimatizes new forms of gender types that conform to capitalist notions of consumerism. Consumerism is the order of the day. More than ever, it is acceptable for anyone to attend Folsom because the edginess has gone. It is an example of de-politicization through increased consumerism. After all, what is so radical or political about watching a sanctioned sexual display when you are buttressed by the logos of corporate sponsors? Before, when the event was smaller, mostly purists would attend. Now, as consumerism has poked holes in the borders of the event, folks from all walks of life who are not otherwise associated with the leather community appear from their homes only to disappear back into their private, domestic, and depoliticized lives. To be clear, their appearance is most notable at the large, national events, and is far less noteworthy at local events in Seattle. The larger, national/international events are more ephemeral and once can masquerade there for a day or two and not suffer the consequences of members who would discipline these non-purists at the smaller, local events. Examples of these folks would be people who are not active in their local communities, have no ties to their local communities, and think of leather as more of a trend than anything else.

All of this is to say that corporatization of these events has diluted and mainstreamed the leather community generally, and its accordant value of hyper-masculinity especially. Oswin (2005) notes that the process of appropriation by capitalism is a normalization of homosexuality, and at IML and Folsom one can certainly see a normalization of a certain type of hyper-masculinity that underpins a hegemonic, male aesthetic (Filiault & Drummond 2007). Because these events are the sine-qua-non of the leather community, this aesthetic filters down to the smaller, local communities like Seattle. Considering the immense number of attendees at both events, especially Folsom, it's little surprise that this aesthetic has made its way into local communities. Additionally, Oswin points out that queerness is not always radical or even progressive and that, in certain manifestations, it may serve to entrench race, gender, and class divides (see also Nast 2002). Now, at Folsom, kinky is hardly queer. Suburbanites have invaded the event—and mostly white, bourgeois suburbanites at that (Marinucci 2013). Thus, while the celebration of a particular type of kink and a particular type of hyper-masculinity is something members of the community value, these events privilege white, male, somewhat affluent, bodies because their appeal has widely expanded to members outside of the community.

Duggan (2003) describes this normalization process as 'homonormative.' If there is a certain type of hegemonic, hyper-masculinity at play, there is also a standard of conduct. Clothing especially, subtly yet strongly, regulates and normalizes comportment, behavior, and grants or blocks access to certain bodies. There is also a strong use of familial language (dad/son, mom/daughter); in fact, there are many relationships within the community that are predicated on this familial aspect. It is not uncommon for someone to be in a Daddy/boy relationship alongside their more conventional boyfriend or girlfriend, or partner. I write more about this use of familial language and social relations in Chapter 4. For our purposes here, the reader should note that

these relationships exist and they are mostly built upon domination and submission but may have other qualities as well like: top/bottom, care taker and care receiver, or may exist primarily in name only.

There is a color-schemed signification of fetish and kink (there is an entire color 'hanky code' that signals to others what kind of sexual fetish you enjoy, see Figure 14).

Hanky Code

HANKY	WORN ON LEFT	WORN ON RIGHT
WHITE	jerk me off	I'll do us both
WHITE VELVET	voyeur	will put on a show
WHITE w/MULTICOLOR Dots	hosting an orgy	looking for an orgy
CREAM	cum fetish (mine)	cum fetish (yours)
BLACK/WHITE check	safe sex top	safe sex bottom
BLACK/WHITE stripes	kissing	kissing
BLACK	SM top	SM bottom
BLACK VELVET	has/takes videos	will perform for the camera
CHARCOAL	latex fetish	latex fetish
GREY, Dark	bondage - ties	fit to be tied
GREY, Light	stone - I'll fuck you	stone - just fuck me
SILVER LAME	celebrity/titleholder	starfucker
OLIVE DRAB	military	Civil "servant"
GREEN, Hunter	looking for orphan	looking for daddy
GREEN (Hunter) w/ Green (Kelly) Stripe	sugardaddy	looking for sugardaddy
GREEN, Kelly	hooker (for rent)	trick (looking to buy)
GREEN, Mint	looking for orphan	looking for mummy
GREEN, Light	dirty talk	dirty talk
GREEN, Lime	dines off tricks (wants food)	dinner plate (will buy dinner)
AQUA	watersex	watersex
BLUE, Teal	genital torturer	genital torturee
BLUE, Robin's Egg	69	69
BLUE, Light	gives oral	wants oral


BLUE, Light w/ light PINK stripe	sucks dildo	suck my dildo
BLUE, Navy	fucking / TOP	fucking / BOTTOM
VELVET, NAVY	watches masturbation	will masturbate for audience
PURPLE	piercer	piercee
LAVENDER	X dresser / dragster	likes X dressers / drag
MAUVE	worship my navel	has a navel fetish
FUCHSIA	spanker	spank me
MAGENTA	suck my pits	armpit lover
MAROON	cuts	bleeds
w/ MAROON stripe	into blood	into blood
RED, Dark	2-handed fister	2-handed fistee
RED	fist fucker	fist fuckee
RED/WHITE Stripes	shaver	shavee
 RED CROSS	HIV positive	HIV positive
PINK, Dark	tit torturer	tit torturee
PUCE	bruiser	bruise me
PINK, Light	dildo wielder	dildo fuckee
YELLOW, Pale	spits	spit on me
YELLOW, Bright	watersports - pisses	watersports drinks/wears
MUSTARD	hung (carries)	size queen
GOLD	2 looking for one	1 looking for two
GOLD LAME	likes muscles	likes muscles
ORANGE	looking to lead	open to suggestion
CORAL	suck my toes	shrimper (sucks toes)
RUST	cowboy	cowboy's horse
BEIGE	rimmer	rim me
TAN	cigarplay - Clinton	cigarplay - Lewinsky
BROWN	scat - gives	scat - receives

Figure 14 is a generic chart that shows the colors and what they represent in terms of kink/sex play.

Many men in the leather community regulate their bodies with this clothing and its color. If you wear your leather armband on your right arm, you are signaling that you are a bottom and are looking or interested in a Top (armband on the left). If you and another person have the same color armband or suspenders, etc. then it is a clear, tacit signal that you are into the same fetish. A shared attraction and sexual compatibility underwrites the sense of community that participants feel, and the body as a territorialized space legitimizes sexual compatibility. Below, Figure 18 demonstrates how men wear this type of clothing. To be clear, the color code is not strictly followed. Often, I ask men if they are into whatever color they are flagging, so to speak, or if they simply like the color of the piece of leather. When I attended local leather events sponsored by SML, Folsom, and IML, most of the men knew what colors represented and were purposefully wearing them. In events in Seattle especially, that were titled “kink” or “fetish” nights but not associated with any group, more men did not know what colors represented what

fetish. They did know that colors stood for something, just not specifically the signification between a color and fetish.



Figure 15 is a picture of five friends of mine at Folsom street fair in their leather gear.

This priority of the body and its sexual prowess turns much of the feminist critique about the mind/body dualism (Rose 1993; Bordo 2003) on its head, especially at the contests. While western philosophy has castigated the body as the realm of women and celebrated the mind as the domain of men, rationalism and logic have little currency at contests. Especially at the national contests, feeding one's 'animalistic desire' and 'primal needs' (both phrases used by several my respondents and folks I spoke to at various events) are but two descriptions used to

explain their intentions. In fact, most attendees at IML and Folsom freely admit to hedonism being a prevailing virtue. This hedonism is coded as hyper-masculine. In other words, it is hyper-masculine to have many sexual partners, especially at these events. Nevertheless, this hedonism relates back to drug-use and masculinity. This subculture is selecting certain traits/indicators of hyper-masculinity but not others. This varies across time and space, but sometimes does not (e.g. wearing leather itself, boots, etc.). Hedonism is about not being in control of yourself, which we can read as actually anti-masculine. Thus, being hedonistic from the standpoint of letting go is at once in line with hyper-masculinity, but also counters to it.

The number of sexual partners is also something that the Goltz (2007) definition does not squarely capture (although it does deal with antifemininity). Thus, traditional understandings of hyper-masculinity miss the aspect of multiple sexual partners so integral to many (but not all) in the leather community. Later, in Chapter 5, I investigate more thoroughly the issue of how the number of sexual partners is coded as masculine—with the higher number making you more masculine. I also show how being a Top versus a Bottom is coded as hyper-masculine or feminine, respectively. The point here, however, is that having multiple sex partners makes one hyper-masculine. Like I have noted previously, where this sex happens is increasingly in private or quasi-private places like hotel rooms and bathhouses. This trend is due to the mainstreaming and corporatization of national events enclosing the places for public, sexual encounters. This enclosure also precipitates another enclosure of the potency and purity of what it means to be a hyper-masculine man in these spaces. Put differently, if I had conducted this research project in the 1980s, I likely would have included ‘displays of public sex’ as part of the indicators of hyper-masculinity. Now, this potential feature is more of a memory than a reality. Thus, we see that the limits of displaying one’s hyper-masculinity relating only to the body and subtle gestures of

sexuality (like armbands and clothing color), but not public sex. Unsanctioned or unofficial sex has all but disappeared from Folsom.

While Rose (1993) and Bordo (2003) demonstrate the historical linking of rationalism to men and animalistic desire to women, something different is happening within the leather community. The culture of the leather community that culminates at IML and Folsom and is practiced and maintained in local communities like Seattle, stands as an oasis, a temporary suspension of this mind/body fallacy. The body, sexual gratification, and sexuality reign supreme. The mind/body dualism largely collapses in the community. For folks in the leather community, it is hyper-masculine to succumb to your animalistic desires. Hyper-masculinity is a celebration of what is 'natural.' Men are supposed to want and have sex. In this way, organizations like SML can have an organizational scheme and use formal rules and procedures to govern their organization, all the while promoting the so-called natural, animalistic qualities of men. Whether one is hunting the hotel lobby at IML, stalking the street at Folsom, or cruising a local event at The Cuff, the idea of a sexual encounter as both a self-gratifying and political event is always present. As one participant at IML explained to me, 'I always have sex because I want to, and sometimes because I'm supposed to.' As we see, although public sex may be mostly off limits now, sex is still very much on men's minds.

Bordo (2003) reminds us that the defining and shaping of the body is the focal point for the shaping of power. The body as the focal point of power is certainly true at local and national contests as it is the key instrument folks use to attract one another in an environment where attraction is fundamental. These men's bodies are power, especially in regards to how they understand, define, and materially shape them. We should not view their bodies as merely receivers of the discourse of hyper-masculinity, a tabula rasa passively awaiting discursive

inscription. Instead, their bodies have generative powers *as well as* receptive tendencies. Tom of Finland, Rough Trade, and other popular cultural icons of the leather community homogenize and normalize the body. Their images, for all their supposed sexuality and virility, homogenize by demonstrating sameness of race, class, and especially gender.

These men's bodies are not only normalized, however; they are also depicted in a way that supports heterosexuality. Rather than trying to disrupt the dominant, heterosexual, hegemonic male aesthetic, these bodies reinforce that aesthetic and celebrate it (Filiault & Drummond 2007). Yet, their efforts at celebrating and intensifying hyper-masculinity, hence the 'hyper' part, speak to their belief that the dominant, heterosexual, hegemonic male aesthetic is not masculine enough. In their efforts to achieve the unachievable body type ideal (Butler 1993), these men perform the virtues of stoicism, strength, and at times, misogyny. In this light, sex as a political act in opposition to heteronormativity is watered down—diluted by a male aesthetic that privileges certain bodies at the expense of others. For example, consider Figure 19 below. Notice how the larger man, with a stoic look on his face carries the smaller man, without a beard and somewhat whimsical looking in his arms. The larger man has a hat on, a flat expression, and (importantly) he has facial hair. The pose too is indicative of stereotypical depictions of men carrying women. Consider the western tradition (Figure 20) of a groom carrying a bride over the threshold after they are newly married.



Figure 16 depicts a common image in Tom of Finland and other generic soft porn, gay male images. A larger man carries a smaller, but willing victim in his arms.



Figure 17 is a generic picture of a man carrying his new bride across the threshold.

This tradition has very ancient roots, dating back to Roman times (Clark 2008). It represents a time when brides were often kidnapped; the groom, in his might, would carry the bride off, protecting her from possible kidnappers. It was also symbolic of him whisking her away into a new life as her new patriarch. Carrying her over the threshold also warded off bad spirits but more importantly, it allowed the bride to appear rather unwilling in her impending loss of

virginity (Clark 2008). Carrying her took away most of her agency; robbing her of a voice or action, she had no say in what was about to happen and the groom asserts his literal and figurative dominance by this carrying act—an act not unlike the kidnapping from which he was apparently protecting her. Both the Tom of Finland picture and the generic wedding picture depict the same type of carrying away of agency. Through her loss, his masculinity is suffused. In its similar pose and depiction, the Tom of Finland picture (either wittingly or unwittingly) cues on the customs of this tradition. In this manner, the carried, more effeminate man is cast as the victim, though a willing one based on his smile. Set against his whimsical smile of resignation, the larger, burly, and stoic carrier is positioned as the protector but also as a kidnapper. The dichotomy of protector and kidnapper plays into the conception of the hyper-masculine man as dominant and aggressive. Thus, the Tom of Finland picture appropriates traditional gender norms and, in the process, reifies hyper-masculinity.

Failed masculinities as evidence of an embodied space

As Joseph (2002) and Muller (2007) indicate, we should be wary of romanticizing the notion of community. Muller and Joseph are careful not to overextend the emancipatory properties of a gay community because communities can exclude as much as they include. Muller goes on to note that communities can take on a corporatized blandness that hardly functions as a site of resistance. Instead, as part of the larger consumptive project of capitalism, gay places sometimes run the risk of being homonormative. As I have shown above, this homonormative tendency is certainly present at leather events. And the production of this homonormativity occurs through the exclusion of particular bodies as much as through the inclusion of other bodies. Thus, in understanding how homonormativity produces certain social relations in leather spaces, we should also look at what or who is absent.

What is most notably absent are disabled bodies. As spaces that celebrate leisure and resistance, leather spaces offer opportunities to conform and resist. But, hyper-masculinity within these spaces relies, in part, on the appearance of able-bodied men. There are some disabilities present, like deaf folks and I saw several folks in wheelchairs. By in large, however, these disabled-bodies appear to be less represented in the community than within the larger culture at large—though admittedly this is an informal observation of mine and more of an intuition. In this manner, the socio-political relations of ableism course through leather spaces—in large part because of the primacy of the body. Ableist bodies reflect the compliant bodies that capitalism constructs. Further, seeing these bodies in leather spaces symbolizes the comportment with neoliberal discourses of self-help that underwrite capitalist social relations; a comportment that Imrie (1996) and Gleeson (1999) have both examined. Thus, being able bodied in leather spaces signals more than just conforming to an aesthetic; it signals a compliance with how the industrial capitalist society of the US continuously shapes the body. Being able bodied means you are not only physically capable but also responsible. In this manner, leather spaces embody capitalist social relations but also discourses of gender. Of course, discourses of gender and capitalism are not separate entities. Indeed, they have co-evolved and thus they entangle within leather spaces to render a community that celebrates the collective essence of community but simultaneously celebrates bodies that reflect discourses of personal responsibility. It is no surprise that one does not witness many disabled bodies within leather spaces. Still, some in the community are aware of this: I recall several conversations with members in the community who noted this absence. No one to whom I spoke had specific strategies for amending this dearth, but at least several members seemed to be aware of the issue.

When we consider the issue of scale and scope, then the issue of privileging ablest space and its role in producing hyper-masculine bodies becomes fuzzier. I argue that disabled bodies are more accepted at an event like Folsom than IML. This is an issue of scale and scope. For scale, the sheer number of people means one is more likely to run into more disabled bodies. The wide scope of Folsom means it is more widely attended and appeals to a wider audience. This phenomenon translates into greater body diversity of all kinds, including disabled bodies. Of course, this is somewhat ironic because the increased scope of Folsom is due in large part to its corporate appropriation. And as I have previously shown, corporate appropriation is a central feature of contemporary capitalist social relations—the very structure that privileges able bodies at the expense of the disabled.

Trans bodies are other anachronistic bodies. But this displacing occurs only in particular ways. As such, we cannot dismiss trans bodies monolithically as anachronistic vis-a-vis the leather community. Indeed, one of my trans respondents has been invited to judge several leather contests. Having said this, the same respondent would likely not be successful as a contestant in most contests, especially at IML. The leather community embodies the notion of a politics of gender based on lived experience and the perception of difference. Hyper-masculinity and transgender gender types in the community are not metaphorical, or merely musings of the imagination. This type of embodied perspective is in line with what Nash (2010) argues for when speaking about a politics for trans folks. Intellectually, this type of understanding of gender based on embodiment opposes Butler's (1993) valuing of the body in her theory of performativity. For the leather community, gender types are rather static—especially hyper-masculinity. This rigidity—this fealty to what it means to be a man—is mirrored in the Old

Guard's strict devotion to the rules. Thus, reflecting what some scholars have argued (e.g., Nelson 1999), the body is the starting place for politics in the leather community.

What this discussion points to is a problem with the definition, or lack thereof, of hyper-masculinity. As a gender type, hyper-masculinity is rigidly understood and scholars deploy it in rather uncritical ways (at least in geography), reflecting the rigidity that communities like the leather community embody. When speaking of bodies, however, scholars understand the body as leaky, porous, and permeable (Parr 1998). Thus, theories of embodiment versus theories of performativity have different starting points. In short, embodiment begins with the body; performativity begins with gender. What scholars should remember, and what has haunted those advocates of performativity and its empirical demonstration, is that spaces of gender often understand it in essentialized ways. What I am initiating here is not an indictment of performativity. Rather, geographers should pay closer attention to the ways that certain spaces, like the leather community, sanction successful performances of gender and the body. Likewise, we should also pay closer attention to the ways those same spaces exclude or render certain performances of gender and the body unsuccessful.

Onward to the past

The purpose of the chapter was to show how hyper-masculinity gets territorialized. A component of that territorialization involves resistances/ironies/contradictions as well as a recurrent policing of hyper-masculinity that leaves some indicators/traits prioritized over others. This prioritization comes at a cost, of course, but does not usually essentialize some at the expense of others. Instead, certain traits are highly privileged because of what they offer in terms of linking up the attributes of hyper-masculinity, like attractiveness or muscularity. Others offer a stronger ability to territorialize space and are therefore attractive in that way

As I have argued, the community is simultaneously a welcoming and ostracizing place and privileges a hyper-masculine, hegemonic male aesthetic with a particular body type at the center of this aesthetic. If we are to believe Butler's (1993) claim that there is no original gender or body type, then we can cast many of these performances, and especially the contests, as representing a fulcrum point for the community in light of a moment of gender articulation. But, understanding hyper-masculinity through the lens of embodiment complicates this conceptualization. For the community, performances of hyper-masculinity are less about moments of gender articulation and more about sustaining a rigid understanding of gender that territorializes leather spaces and the bodies that inhabit them—though part of the point is that these two moves are one and the same. Likewise, while members may desire a rigid understanding of hyper-masculinity, what my work shows is that there is variation. Thus, the rigidity of hyper-masculinity that members work diligently to maintain is also undermined by those performances meant to maintain it in that each performance demonstrates that there is variation—not rigidity. Of course, these performances rest on the fallacy that there is an original, hyper-masculine, body type. As such, these performances attempt to conjure such an original image-type largely through bodily display and depiction at the contests. Moreover, successful or failed performances of hyper-masculinity rely on the appearance of physically abled bodies. Allowing the success of these abled bodies are the structures of capitalism and consumerism that produce compliant bodies indicative of manual labor. In their pageantry and celebration of the community's history, the Old Guard ceaselessly reaches back into the past to summon the true, hyper-masculine, and male aesthetic. In such an act, the community at once creates the space for the maintenance of hyper-masculinity within it and the grounds upon which to dismantle it theoretically.

Chapter 4: Placing ‘hyper-masculinity’ in Seattle’s gay leather community

This chapter critiques the concept of hyper-masculinity through a more nuanced, place-contingent, critical way to think about masculinity. Hyper-masculinity has not been sufficiently theorized, and in short, that is the aim of this chapter. The result is a theorization of hyper-masculinity that pays closer attention to space and unpacks the contradiction between the ways geographers use the term in de-essentialized language and how non-academics use the terms in highly essentialized language. I also investigate the role of whiteness and how it relates to performances of hyper-masculinity within the community. In the previous chapter, I mentioned how the concept of hyper-masculinity plays key roles in both the national leather community and Seattle’s community. Here, I focus on the deployment and performances of hyper-masculinity within Seattle’s leather community specifically. I use the concept of hyper-masculinity to highlight a conceptual problem between essentialist and de-essentialized notions of gender. Constructionist notions of masculinity (Bell et al. 1994; Berg & Longhurst 2003; Connell 2005; Vanderbeck 2005; Hopkins & Noble 2009; Bryant & Garnham 2015) do not escape the essentialist problem; however, by critiquing and offering a placed conceptualization of hyper-masculinity based on Seattle’s gay leather community, I push the boundaries of masculinity and gender to arrive at a more nuanced, embodied, place-based and contingent understanding of hyper-masculinity thereby side-stepping the debate concerning essentialist/constructionist conceptualizations of masculinity. Ultimately, I interrogate hyper-masculinity within the community to demonstrate how it reinforces and subverts heterosexual gender roles and homonormativity.

As I noted in the introduction, many scholars have recorded a pervasive, society-wide crisis in masculinity (Jackson 1991; Jhally et al. 1999; Hopkins 2007, 2016; Hopkins & Noble 2009; Way 2011; Kimmel 2012) and this crisis has certainly infiltrated Seattle's leather community. My respondents (usually) implicitly or explicitly cited this crisis as a reason and force to which the community is now responding. Countless times I heard the phrase, 'real men do...' or 'a real man is/does...' Usually they followed this statement with: able to talk about his emotions, strong (both literally and figuratively), is not feminine, is masculine acting (when I pushed on what this meant, some said it mean not feminine, macho, has a deep voice, looks angry or emotionless,) and has swagger. While I am sure this type of phrasing has existed in the community since its inception, the phrasing takes on new meaning when we project it against the crisis in masculinity. The scholars who have studied this crisis attribute it to several reasons: anxiety among men spawning from the forces of industrialization, deindustrialization, the so-called invasion of women into the workplace, and a loss of control over the terrain and displays of masculinity. This crisis is occurring at both the national and local scales and is a narrative that men use to explain their somewhat tenuous situation in society. In other words, this narrative helps contextualize the question, 'what does it now mean to be a man?' Understood in this context, I found Seattle's leather community to be a fertile ground in which to excavate the effects of this crisis and how those effects influence hyper-masculinity within the community.

Scholars both outside and within geography (see especially Longhurst 2000; Simpson 2004; Connell 2005; Vanderbeck 2005; Cupples, Guyatt, & Pearce 2007; Peake 2009; Richardson 2015) discuss the crisis and its effects in numerous spaces. These authors also accentuate that the crisis is underwritten with issues of class and whiteness (see Kimmel [2012] for an in-depth discussion of the intersection of whiteness, middle-class angst, and masculinity).

Thus, to understand more completely Seattle's gay leather community and hyper-masculinity within it, we need to place the community within the larger social milieu a la the crisis in masculinity. This is not to say that men of color or of varying socioeconomic statuses do not express concern about their role as men; but white men, in particular, embody a malaise concerning this crisis quite fervently (Kimmel 2012). As Duggan (2003) and Puar (2008) assert, the co-evolution of capitalism and gender means that gender is also coded with the racial and class lines inherent in capitalism. Thus, issues of hyper-masculinity within the community intersect with these same racial and class lines. Because most of the men in the community are white, it is no surprise the crisis most dramatically impacts whiteness within the community.

Interacting with the structural forces that inform and constitute hyper-masculinity are the principal motivations of this chapter. Whereas the last chapter was more broadly focused on the contests, how the national and local scales of the community interact, and how the body undergirds those interactions, this chapter is focused on hyper-masculinity at the local scale. Seattle's leather community is a fecund place to study hyper-masculinity because members of the community often celebrate and reify the concept. In fact, when it comes to many Daddy/boy relationships, often one of the main goals is to train the boy to be, in the words of one of my respondents, 'a proper man.' While there was some variation on what constituted a 'proper man,' most of my research subjects spoke of: manners, looking people in the eye, directness, honesty, responsibility, strength. Interestingly, there was little to no mention of sexual characteristics. I attribute this tendency to the context of the question (usually early in my interviews before sex had thoroughly been discussed) and the word *proper* that likely functioned as a sterilizing force in that proper had a way of sterilizing that part of the conversation.

Nevertheless, while there is bonanza of theorizing and conceptualizing concerning masculinity, hyper-masculinity within geography is a largely taken-for-granted concept. Moreover, while scholars have linked hyper-masculinity with the BDSM community (see especially Bell et al. 1994; Weiss 2011) few have explored how members in the BDSM community construct the concept of hyper-masculinity and the implications of this construction on geographies of masculinity and gender. Outside of geography, Weiss (2011) is particularly useful here because she highlights the linkage between notions of heterosexual male dominance and race and class within the BDSM community and how we cannot think of the BDSM community as monolithically transgressive vis-a-vis heteronormativity. My fieldwork at every event I attended supports this claim, especially considering that the winners of most contests tend to conform to the hegemonic male aesthetic. Instead, traditional gender roles are often reproduced within the BDSM community even though, as one of my respondent notes, ‘part of being in the fetish/leather community is that you can create new categories that do not correspond to traditional categories.’ Weiss reminds us, however, that notions of race and class are intimately bound up with gender and even fetishes, and the spaces where we practice those fetishes. Similar linkages operate within Seattle’s gay leather community and these linkages simultaneously reinforce and transgress notions of hyper-masculinity and heterosexual gender roles.

Conceptual anxiety

Intellectually, there is a problem with using ‘hyper-masculine.’ It rehashes the staid debate between essentialism and constructionism because it is undefined within geography. This lack of a definition and insufficient theorization results in scholars deploying the term problematically. In the current climate of understanding gender as a construction, using *hyper-*

masculine threatens to undermine much of the clarity and hard work that geographers have conducted to highlight the contingency of gender to space, place, and embodiment. My research on Seattle's gay leather community is an attempt to work through the problematic of using an essentialist term by paying closer attention to the spatial particularities of hyper-masculinity within Seattle's gay leather community. This close attention to the spatiality of hyper-masculinity within the community allows geographers to more clearly define hyper-masculinity as it relates to specific communities. Doing this helps resolve the disconnection between theories of gender and how many men use their bodies and understandings of hyper-masculinity in particularly embodied ways.

The result of this attention and my empirical work is an examination and critique of how hyper-masculinity circulates within Seattle's gay leather community and what the performances of hyper-masculinity within the community say about broader conceptualizations of masculinity. This chapter is organized into five sections excluding the introduction. The first section briefly outlines the history of the Seattle, local, gay leather community. The next section situates hyper-masculinity within the local community. The third section segues into a discussion of how performances of hyper-masculinity simultaneously support and subvert hyper-masculinity and the implications of these performances on larger discussions of masculinity. On one hand, we may consider performances of hyper-masculinity as capturing the elements of gender that my respondents see as essential. The issue, however, is that my respondents do not see hyper-masculinity as a performance. They may talk about it in language that indicates it is a performance, but if you ask them directly, they would almost all tell you that while there are moments of gender expression, it is something intrinsic that touches on something lasting (or historical), not ephemeral. Finally, I discuss the division between the Old Guard and the New

Guard and how that division informs hyper-masculinity within the community. As previously mentioned, linking to this discussion of masculinity are the issues of class, race, and (obviously) sexuality that course through Seattle's gay leather community. As Rubin (1993a) demonstrates, there is a long running theorization of how sexuality and gender operate together (perhaps a more consistent theorization than, say, gender and class, or gender and race within sexuality studies); this chapter seeks to further explore that relationship. Although the intersection of multiple dimensions of identity certainly occurs within the community, an in-depth, intersectional analysis (see Peake [2009] for an excellent discussion of intersectionality) of how those structures are co-produced is beyond the scope of this chapter—it suffices to say that hyper-masculinity within Seattle's gay leather community is deeply implicated in the production of homonormativity that privileges whiteness.

A key issue I need to address in this chapter is the problem of defining hyper-masculinity. Understanding masculinity as purely a performance does not capture the elements that my respondents see as essentially masculine (like the body, or Tops versus Bottoms), nor does it give enough ontological significance to the body (Nelson 1999; Nash 2010). And while Butler may confer some measure of ontological significance to the body and space, performativity, as Nelson (1999) argues, does not adequately foreground bodies and space. This problem means that the theory of performativity and, in a more general sense, the social construction of masculinity, undervalue the body and folks' everyday experiences with masculinity, the body, and my respondents linking of masculinity/femininity to Tops/Bottoms, respectively. If we add to this already problematic theorization of masculinity the concept of hyper-masculinity, we potentially usher in a new problem where we understand masculinity as socially constructed but

simultaneously use an essentialized concept (*hyper-masculine*) to describe some of masculinity's attributes.

Another issue I engage with is that masculinity—within geography—is defined with gender neutral terms. The definitions for masculinity and femininity, therefore, work equally well for both. This epistemological paradox requires us to qualify definitions of masculinity so they are more place-specific and encapsulate many of the dimensions of the concept. Indeed, most of my respondents use terms like *non-feminine* and *macho* to define hyper-masculinity within a leather context, thus linking their colloquial descriptions of hyper-masculinity to Goltz's (2007) definition. I argue that the prevailing tendency within geography is to understand masculinity as socially constructed, with less of an eye to the place-contingency and embodied aspect of various masculinities. Nelson (1999) and Nash (2010) have made similar arguments: They argue that society receives women's and men's bodies differently. This difference in lived experience forces us to realize that women and men embody different subjectivities. I maintain, therefore, that we should pay closer attention to the way particular groups (in this case Seattle's gay, leather community) essentialize *and* try to blend that with conceptualizations that hold masculinity as socially constructed. Furthermore, examining masculinity in sub-groups that practice an extreme form of it reveals something to us that we might otherwise miss. In other words, groups on the margins of society have enormous potential to reveal normalizing processes and structural forces precisely because of their semiotic and relational differences to the status quo, or what Haraway (1996) calls the 'scandal of the status quo.'

The particularities of hyper-masculinity within Seattle's community

The first leather club(s) appeared in Seattle in the late 1970s. One respondent fondly recalled, 'we had a leather bar in the Central District in 1978 called the Branding Iron. It was at

27th and Union. Not a gay bar but a leather bar.’ As the founding members aged, they developed rules and customs that later solidified into the ‘Old Guard’ traditions. The division between the old/New Guards is a somewhat fuzzy but significant one (and this division is a nation-wide phenomenon). As one prominent Figure noted,

the Old Guard had taken the structure of like the motorcycle groups and gangs and whatnot and had taken the hyper-masculine aspects of that and built the leather community based on that. Although they did that, that aspect is still very much a part of leather in general because leather men are leather *men* [respondent’s emphasis]. They are manly men who do manly things and if you want to be a Boy in leather you are really a Boy and whatnot and the headspace that goes into that has a lot to do with it.

The leather contests also help promote the legacy of the community by celebrating attributes like: confidence, being articulate, attractiveness, muscularity, and swagger. Phrases like, ‘manly man’ are not uncommon within the Seattle community. In fact, the entire existence of the community is largely predicated on the notion of what it means to be a man. Many of the notions about masculinity within Seattle’s leather community cue on common tropes of the Pacific Northwest, like the lumberjack. Interestingly, this motif stands in stark contrast to the current techie climate of King County, where the four largest employers are Boeing, Microsoft, the University of Washington, and Amazon, respectively. Given this contrast, perhaps it is not surprising that some members cling steadfastly to the local practices and traditions of the community. Indeed, in some contests, the judges ask contestants to perform a Pacific Northwest masculinity even. When I asked respondents what that meant, most usually stated that contestants would wear flannel shirts, ski or snowboarding attire, or carry axes out onto the stage (some even refer to flannel shirt/axe motif as ‘lumbersexual’). What these masculine subjectivities have in common is that they are all dependent on outdoor pursuits. Therefore, while masculinity within the local community relies in part on national themes and clothing that

one can easily recognize at large national and international events like Folsom, the local community borrows from the hegemonic masculinity at play in the region. This example demonstrates that the Seattle leather man embodies multiple subjectivities that operate on both national and regional scales that combine in what we may call an urban, national masculinity with an ‘outdoorsy,’ regional masculinity.

The oldest respondent of my group consistently argues that while the leather community is a distinct entity, its borders are porous and its history cannot be understood outside of the larger history of kink sex play in general. He even traces the origins of leather back to the Marquis de Sade! When I asked him directly about hyper-masculinity within the Seattle community, he had little to say, suggesting that members might deploy the term in the hopes of conducting certain political work rather than fealty to historical accuracy. For other members of the community, hyper-masculinity seemed to figure more prominently in the community. One respondent noted,

if you look at those [Tom of Finland] arch types [sic] that’s what a lot of people in there think they are supposed to look like because those guys are all big and buff and strong and they are firefighters and they are policeman and you know lumberjacks wielding giant chainsaws and then you know coming across each other in the woods and doing terrible things. And it’s that sort of mental fantasy and that sort of like, ‘I am giant and bigger and stronger and have more hair on my chest and bigger balls than you, than all of you guys.’

This member sees leather more as a permanent lifestyle—not something to don once or twice a year for sexual gratification or trendiness in the community. Stereotypical depictions of men’s bodies with bulging arms, small waists, broad shoulders and chests, as well as the reference to ‘the woods,’ denote the qualities of hyper-masculinity especially as they relate to the body. Add to this the flair of almost predatory sexuality, and hyper-masculinity takes on an aggressive tinge.

In Figure 21, this type of image is depicted in a larger-than-life statue in CC's, one of the local bars in Seattle.



Figure 18 is a picture of statue inside of CC's in Seattle. It shows the exaggerated form of the hyper-masculine man. Notice his tiny waist compared to his over-sized shoulders and arms.

Contrasting the Old Guard's devotion to history and stereotypical portrayals of male bodies, the New Guard celebrates leather as an ephemeral performance and not as a *raison d'être*. What is

important to remember when discussing the Old Guard versus the new is that this theme is important to my respondents. While no one may identify solely as old or New Guard, the discussions that this real or imagined division sparks are quite lively and fruitful. Thus, the division is important to the members, even if such a division does not exist very materially. Reflected in this schism are different understandings of what it means to be a man and decorum within the community, and these competing notions create a mild tension between members. Moreover, while there is some overlap, often New Guard members do not describe hyper-masculinity in the same manner that Old Guard members do. For the New Guard, masculinity has more to do with confidence and attitude alone than with muscularity, predatory sexuality, or the archetypes of the lumberjack or firefighter. Still, one member, who openly disliked the rigid structure of some of the traditions, described hyper-masculinity in equally essentializing terms. For him, hyper-masculinity was, ‘well-defined, muscular, strong looking. The feel that when you look at them you’re not sure if they’re going to kill you or fuck you.’

During the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, the membership of Seattle’s leather community dropped significantly, according to many of my respondents. Many of the elder members in clubs across the country and Seattle died, and their deaths created a vacuum of leadership. As one respondent noted, ‘The other thing of course was that HIV and AIDS decimated the Old Guard. There is a fraction of the people who were alive and who were members at that time and active in it anymore. They simply lost a lot of them. And so, what you have...a lot of the smaller clubs have closed.’ Because of this vacuum, the traditions, rules, and social organization of the community changed since there were fewer older members to police the boundaries of masculinity within the community. Newer members who did not know the history or were not initiated into the group through more traditional rites eventually filled the

void. If anything, the emergence of the New Guard has helped to recuperate the losses of the 1980s and 1990s. Still, some members have noted that the rise in membership in the community may be deceiving. This inflated membership occurs because, while there are technically 250+ members in Seattle Men in Leather alone, only a small portion of those show up to scheduled leather events. There are other benefits one receives from joining Seattle Men in Leather or other leather groups (such as getting into local clubs for no cover), and these benefits might help to explain the disparity between membership and attendance at events.

In a positivist sense, hyper-masculinity describes something that is taken-for-granted, or what is assumed to exist already. Its messiness as a discursive or theoretical category is evidenced in part by the lack of a definition. After all, why define something that is axiomatic, pre-existing? Nevertheless, at a minimum, the concept is a useful rhetorical trope for several communities (in this case the leather community), so obtaining a more nuanced conceptualization of the term is useful. Reflecting on the tendency to assume the meaning of hyper-masculinity suggests that we must discuss hyper-masculinity in place-specific ways. Place-specific definitions allow us to account for the particularities of that concept. This contingency to place helps resolve the disconnection between my respondents' discussion of the term and theoretical discussions of the term. My respondents tended to discuss masculinity in highly essentialized terms versus the generally accepted social constructionist terms within geographical literature (e.g., Berg & Longhurst 2003; Simpson 2004; Connell 2005; Hopkins & Noble 2009). Indeed, much of the thrust of this research grows from the similarities and differences I see between the discursive categories within the literature and the rhetorical categories and strategies in the leather community. For example, one of my respondents defined hyper-masculine: 'it's like oh my gosh you've taken bodybuilding too far. Like you know you

look like one of the bodybuilders of Mr. Olympia or you even had some implants and you're always wearing leather and you're always trying to act as butch as possible...’ This description does not completely match other uses of hyper-masculine within geographical literature. For Bell et al. (1994), hyper-masculinity has something to do with ‘heterosexuality,’ but beyond this, the authors are reluctant to define the concept more specifically. Vanderbeck (2005) also uses the term, but does not define it.

We can however, read *butch* as hyper-masculine and even antifeminine. And the messiness or lack of alignment and coherency of hyper-masculinity within the literature only demonstrates its contingency to particular communities and places. In this specific instance, this respondent is discussing a person he saw at International Mr. Leather, though he noted the same tendency of members in Seattle. Of note, is the idea that one can take their hyper-masculinity too far. For most of the people I spoke to, they indicated that there were limits to hyper-masculinity’s appeal, i.e. going ‘too far.’ Going too far revolved around fakeness. Most of my respondents wanted to feel that someone’s display of hyper-masculinity was genuine and not an affectation. Insofar as we are all performing, the appearance (or should I say verisimilitude?) of authentically hyper-masculine attributes is part of the formula that makes men attractive. Much of this authenticity relies on the absence of feminine attributes. For the leather community, deep voices, chest hair, and muscles are not usually associated with femininity and are therefore hyper-masculine. Organically displaying these attributes while simultaneously not going too far is the sweet spot of an embodiment of hyper-masculinity within the leather community.

In a community celebrating a concept that is marked with excessive display, the notion that one can take that display too far does show some (ironic) limitations or boundaries of hyper-masculinity—at least within the leather community. In fact, another respondent noted that some

men take ‘aggressiveness too seriously.’ Thus, whether the dimension of hyper-masculinity is body or aggression, my respondents do believe that the concept has, or should have, limits; although, the limitations appear to be associated with certain dimensions of the concept rather than the concept as a whole. Of course, these associated limitations may often be personal in nature, i.e. linked to one’s personal sexual desires and turn-offs. The point is that, while members may laud hyper-masculinity within the community, people often pick and choose which dimensions they want to celebrate.

This tendency to pick and choose plays out spatially as well. When it comes to the contests where men compete on the stage for various titles, like ‘Seattle Leather Daddy,’ most of my respondents argued that the winners are chosen based on physical beauty. Physical beauty denotes relatively ‘in-shape’ bodies with muscles and attractive faces (while attractive faces is arguably more subjective, most of my respondents said something about good bone structure, strong jaws, or symmetry). In a metaphorical manner, the physical features of hyper-masculinity, by virtue of their size and muscularity, reflect dominance and hierarchy. Consider another contest, Seattle’s Leather Daddy and Seattle Daddy’s Boy. The couple that wins often poses with the Boy kneeling on one or both knees, while the Daddy stands next to him, sometimes holding a collar¹² around the Boy’s neck or the back of the Boy’s neck. Such a pose reflects an obvious hierarchy between the Daddy and Boy, which in turn, subtly reinforces heterosexual gender roles (Weiss 2011) in that Daddies are often described as Tops, masculine, and dominant (dominance is one of, if not the, defining characteristic of a Top). Boys are often described as Bottoms, sometimes feminine, and definitely submissive (submissiveness is one of, if not the, defining

¹² Collars are sometimes worn by the subordinate person in a leather/BDSM relationship. Collars represent submission, obedience, and ownership by and to a dominant. In a gay male context, collars are often metal chains with padlocks on them and the Dom holds the key. They signify the submissive’s surrendering of power and agency to the Dominant.

characteristic of a Boy). This is not to say that Boys cannot be hyper-masculine. In fact, many Daddies/Doms desire their Boy to be hyper-masculine. The contest is more about the power imbalance in these relationships and performing hyper-masculinity heightens this power imbalance. Figure 19 shows three of Seattle's past winners of Seattle Leather Daddy and Seattle Daddy's Boy.



Figure 19 depicts the pose that winners and competitors of the Seattle Leather Daddy and Daddy's boy contest take to show the power relationship between the Daddy and his boy.

Notice the Daddy's somewhat looming stance and hand placement. This is an obvious demonstration of control and authority.

On one level, these contests offer potential to be transgressive, queer spaces. They celebrate sex and non-traditional (or at least usually hidden) sex roles. Celebrating homosexual sex predicated on power imbalances is not completely homonormative. Counter to the supporting

of heteronormativity or homonormativity, Seattle's community uses leather contests and sexual encounters/play to subvert those structures. Linking this play to the stated politics concerning sexual freedom, and more generally a politics that does not embrace traditional domesticity, we can observe Seattle's leather community as anti-homonormative. The sex play between members of the community occurs between two men, but it is not uncommon for sexual encounters to take place between a woman and a man where the woman is in a position of power; she may be the Dom. Thus, this playing with gender roles, especially if a woman is the Dom, undermines heteronormative gender roles.

Undermining heteronormative gender roles also complicates traditional understandings of US, fraternal patriarchy.¹³ Understood in this light, we can loosely describe hyper-masculinity within the community as the domination of men. I argue, however, that who is doing the dominating is less of an issue than who they are dominating. In this light, hyper-masculinity's relation to patriarchy illuminates my larger point about placing hyper-masculinity more critically. Theorizing hyper-masculinity by implication, as Bell et al. (1994) and Vanderbeck (2005) do, runs the risk of creating a monolithic, hegemonic system of gender relations that feminist scholars in relation to patriarchy have attempted to unravel (Grewal & Kaplan 1994). In short, hyper-masculinity has too many contingencies to place for scholars to leave it undefined.

In another context, hyper-masculinity supports paternal patriarchy. The celebration of dominance and subordination in the community folds into more stereotypical, heterosexual

¹³ I make a distinction between fraternal patriarchy and familial or paternal patriarchy. Fraternal patriarchy is men dominating women in civil society. Familial or paternal patriarchy is men dominating families, including other men, in the realms of social and economic production. Feminist geography has taken understandings of patriarchy to highlight multiple overlapping in different places. Beyond the noting of multiple overlappings, however, I hesitate to support an understanding of patriarchy that advocates its theoretical deployment monolithically as a hegemonic system of oppression. This type of theorization of patriarchy would miss the nuances of place in the same way that monolithically deploying the concept of hyper-masculinity does.

gender roles. This support of stereotypes might appear to be ironic at first glance, but if we take a historical perspective, it is exactly what we should expect. The community celebrates its history and is ostentatious when it comes to the privileging of hyper-masculinity. Linking local practices to the national history means that the post-WWII idea of what is hyper-masculine is reified within the local community. The leather of the biker clubs and uniforms can be traced back to that WWII generation. This was a time relatively free from modern-day understandings of gender diversity. Therefore, while the community is a place accepting of women and positive attitudes toward sex, its appropriation of the historical trope of hyper-masculinity renders it a patriarchal space. This contradiction of hyper-masculinity being both patriarchal and anti-patriarchal denotes the need to pay closer attention to the places where folks practice hyper-masculinity.

Interestingly, the Seattle community has turned Chauncey's (1996) historical claim that privacy could only be had in public, on its head. Privacy can now be had, and is mostly had, in private. Of course, many members are keenly aware that their public, often bar-located (and more specifically at The Cuff), displays of kink sex play (which almost never entail penetration because of Seattle's liquor board laws) are more overt political acts. These political acts accomplish several goals: they push the boundaries within the gay community generally about what is acceptable sex play, they authenticate queer space (Bell & Binnie 2004) by de-pathologizing leather and kink sex play, and they allow members to celebrate their individual sexuality openly. In this way, sexual displays (like flogging or polishing of boots, for example) in public spaces are a key method for the community to express its political and sexual identities. More aggressively, members of SML conduct what they call 'invasions' into traditionally non-leather spaces to insert their sexual, political agenda if through no other means than sheer

incursion. I cast this appropriation of queer, but non-leather, spaces (Bell & Binnie 2004) to authenticate queer space, but also an antagonistic method to authenticate the community's existence. Put differently, if we are the spaces we inhabit, then the community's incursion into more homonormative queer spaces suggests a very self-conscious attempt to normalize what Bell and Binnie (2004) call the 'queer unwanted.'

More generally, my respondents emphasize assertive or even aggressive sexual displays and pursuits, muscular bodies, confidence, and to a lesser extent 'straight acting' as features of hyper-masculinity within the Seattle community. While 'straight acting' and 'heterosexuality' have something in common, we cannot claim that hyper-masculinity appears the same within all spaces. Yet, we do have evidence of how masculinity structures various communities in embodied ways (Nayak 2003; Bryant & Garnham 2015; Warren 2016). As these authors demonstrate, while the dimensions of masculinity may vary, they nevertheless inform how men behave. Within leather spaces in Seattle—like The Cuff and the Center for Sex Positive Culture—hyper-masculinity's dimensions vary. Respondents describe hyper-masculinity as, 'tattooed, strong, and confident,' while others describe attributes like: muscles, beards, and flannel attire, thus evincing the particularity of hyper-masculinity to Seattle leather spaces. Other scholars who incorporate hyper-masculinity within their work (Filiault & Drummond 2007) note the same type of variation in regards to place. Indeed, while there is some overlap between their assessments of hyper-masculinity and my work, there is still considerable dissimilarity. To understand hyper-masculinity, then, is to undertake an historical, as well as contemporary, place-specific project; and then we need to contextualize specific displays and performances of hyper-masculinity in specific spaces. In this case, bars like The Cuff offer a public space for the promotion of sexual, and both homonormative and anti-homonormative, political agendas.

Private spaces allow members to pursue their sexual desires on a more personal and less overtly political scale. The public/private dichotomy means that Seattle's community has differing attributes and dimensions than perhaps other leather communities in the United States.

Other scholars have critiqued the category of masculinity in a related but more general sense when they argue that the category of masculinity essentializes and does not expose the fluid and sometimes contradictory nature of identity (Hopkins 2009; Collier 1998). Again, understanding the difference between the discursive and theoretical categories that scholars often use, and the rhetorical categories that members in local communities use, helps clarify the sometimes subtle yet important differences between how scholars discuss concepts like hyper-masculinity within and among communities and how members in those particular communities use those concepts in similar or different manners.

Linking hyper-masculinity with key literature

The three works of Bell et al. (1994), Vanderbeck (2005), and Filiault and Drummond (2007) have been particularly influential in my thinking about the concept of hyper-masculinity. These scholars have made valuable contributions to our epistemologies of masculinity and hyper-masculinity with Bell et al. (1994) becoming a foundational work. They use *hyper-masculine* to denote a certain set of characteristics within the empirical context of their research projects but also deploy the concept without offering a definition. Bell et al. (1994) trace masculine elements within the skinhead movement of Great Britain. Vanderbeck (2005) explains his discomfort and feeling out-of-place while in the field, and Filiault and Drummond (2007) use the concept to describe the attributes of the hegemonic, male aesthetic. 'Hyper' is not defined in any of these works and, on a basic level, this leaves the reader wondering what *hyper* means, or at least, what the authors think it means in relation to a particular community or place. The

implication is that *hyper* somehow means more intensely masculine, but my research conveys that it is essential to consider how people and communities articulate this concept spatially to arrive at a more nuanced conceptualization of the term.

As my previous example about the Leather Daddy and Leather Daddy's Boy Contest demonstrates, hyper-masculinity relies as much on the hyper-masculine elements for its expression as it does on the non-masculine or feminine elements. The dominance of the Top is only possible through the willing submission of the Boy—at least initially. This relationship is sometimes expressed by the common refrain that, 'the Bottom or Boy has all the power,' noting that power circulates through the interplay of the Daddy and Boy and is not purely Top-down. Here again, we witness the (re)inscription of traditional gender roles as the refrain that, 'the Bottom or Boy has all the power' is like heterosexual notions that women, not men, have all the power in relationships. Thus, while the Daddy/Boy dynamic is certainly queer, it is also laden with heterosexual undertones. For Seattle's leather community, therefore, submissive Boys are as integral to the maintenance of hyper-masculinity as dominant Tops. The advertisement of the Seattle Leather Daddy and Seattle Daddy's Boy demonstrate this relationship; for example, in Figure 20, we see a Daddy and Boy caught in a pose of impending discipline (Daddy's role) and inviting and slightly taunting punishment (Boy's role).



Figure 20 is an advertisement for the Seattle Leather Daddy and Daddy's boy contest. The picture shows the Daddy's determination and seriousness while depicting the boy drolly inviting him to discipline him, all the while shrugging his shoulders. As both Figures are relatively the same size and share an equal amount of space in the advertisement, the Boy appears just as much in control of the situation as the crop-holding Daddy.

This excessiveness and intensity that Bell et al. (1994), Vanderbeck (2005), and Filiault and Drummond (2007) discuss, and which my respondents/observations support, intimates that masculinity has some core element(s) to hype up. We might ask, if masculinity can turn into hyper-masculinity, can it also turn into hypo-masculinity? And what would hypo-masculine mean? Would it mean antifeminine? Would it be a more Foucauldian (1978) understanding of the maintenance of a hegemonic, male aesthetic? In short, yes. Hypo-masculine would likely mean antifeminine or something opposed to hyper-masculine. Yet, as gender is a relational

concept, it is not surprising that the opposite of hyper-masculine is often discussed as feminine. More importantly, these questions point to an invisible standard, what I call a latent essentialism, that using hyper-masculinity invokes. By latent essentialism I mean thoughts, emotions, and ideas about being masculine that exist, but are not always expressed, in the minds and attitudes of folks in regards to gender—though other identity categories, like sexuality, would work as well. If we can hype up, or hypo down our masculinity, then such ability implies an ideal masculine type, standard, or norm. Yet, a norm or standard is the very thing that popular theorists like Butler (1993) and Connell (2005) inveigh. Ultimately a standard or norm implies an original, a recapitulation of etiology that Butler endeavors to defy, and that using the term hyper-masculine, without a clear definition, invokes.

Bell et al. (1994) artfully demonstrate the reproduction of a standard when they argue how straight space is always assumed to come before gay space—that gay space is always invading and incurring into straight space. In this analysis, they are trying not to make an essentialist move in their discussion of space, but ironically, they tend to reproduce another standard by using the term *hyper-masculinity*. In their discussion of space, they use Butler's argument to claim that there is no original space and that every space approximates an ideal hetero-space. While this spatial argument is in keeping with the internal logic of Butler's theory, incorporating hyper-masculinity unwittingly cloaks a hidden standard about what it means to be masculine—especially when we do not define it. By fleshing out the particularities of hyper-masculinity within Seattle's leather community and ways the community occupies and transforms space, we can see the hidden standard that hyper-masculinity invokes. Scholars need to clearly tie such concepts to places and/or communities. To be clear, reproducing a standard when discussing gender is perhaps unavoidable; however, if we define and contextualize the

standard, space, and (in this case) community to which we reference—as I have tried to do here—we can at least be more transparent about the kinds of claims we are making. Therefore, Seattle’s gay leather community and my discussion of it discursively (using Tops/Bottoms, Daddy/Boy, and queer spaces) reproduces and subverts heteronormative and homonormative notions about power and gender in a similar manner that Weiss (2011) claims.

Conceptualization of hegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005) is ultimately the foundation for most geographical work on masculinity. Berg and Longhurst (2003) speak of multiple masculinities and the importance of scale and place and how that leads to different ways of being masculine. I extend this geographical work by focusing on the community as a space, and hyper-masculinity within it. Understanding categories of identity as socially constructed is certainly nothing new (see Peake [2009], along with the debate in *Gender, Place and Culture* in the 1990s). As Connell (2005) reminds us, we cannot produce a science or generalizing science from the study of masculinity precisely because it is not a coherent category. Connell’s claim impugns masculinity as a valid ontology. I argue that masculinity *is* a valid ontology. In these poststructuralist times, however, we have become adept at deconstructing categories of identity with geographers demonstrating how they have different spatial properties according to their place. This deconstruction is a worthwhile endeavor. Let us not, however, throw the poststructuralist baby out with the bathwater. In other words, we should be wary of deconstructing categories to such an extent that we theorize them away. Connell’s (2005) rejoinder concerning the incoherence of masculinities is at once a powerful demonstration of the complexity of scattered masculinities and a dangerous flirtation with allowing masculinities—as a valid ontology—to slip into the theoretical graveyard. There are many theorists who deal with masculinities (Bell et al. 1994; Berg & Longhurst 2003; Nayak 2003;

Vanderbeck 2005; Aitken 2006; Hopkins & Noble 2009; Bryant & Garnham 2015; Childs 2015) and, for all its messiness, we still attempt to understand its contingency to place. Doing so indicates that on some basic level, we believe that masculinity has some ontological significance. In this same context, I argue to accept hyper-masculinity as a loosely coherent category. To shore up its loose coherency, we need to pay closer attention to place when we use the term. Following this logic, we should not accept hyper-masculinity as a coherent category without reference to specific places and without clearly articulated dimensions and indicators.

Supporting or subverting hyper-masculinity?

We may loosely understand the embodiment of certain dimensions of hyper-masculinity as strategic (Veronis 2007). This embodiment is especially true in the old-guard's defining of leather. More than just a physical look, one of my respondents noted that, 'leather is a mindset, something I do every day.' This permanency of leather-as-lifestyle suggests that hyper-masculinity is, in part, strategic and allows for a sense of belonging in the community. Other features of hyper-masculinity, power and confidence, transcended the Old Guard/New Guard binary. This transcendence suggests that at least in the minds of my respondents, certain features of masculinity are pre-given. Put differently, my respondents (at least implicitly) acknowledge the strategic aspect of wearing leather within the community, but they tend not to acknowledge anything strategic about masculinity per se. As one member noted, 'I think what transpired was that a lot of those that were looking for somebody to guide them ended up having to teach themselves so they picked and grabbed the things that attracted them. And they turned it into what they believe...'

The above quote demonstrates how some of the New Guard members 'grabbed' parts of hyper-masculinity that appealed to them. Later, however, that same respondent also declared,

‘They’re [members of the leather community] looking for somebody who has the features of walking in, being masculine, being comfortable with who they are, and looking very, very... What’s the word I’m looking for, confident I guess.’ These two quotes conduct two types of cultural work. On one hand, they highlight hyper-masculinity’s social construction, i.e. ‘grabbed the things that attracted them.’ On the other hand, they highlight how parts of hyper-masculinity have become reified over time, i.e. ‘walking in, being masculine.’ New Guard members also described masculinity as, ‘confidence, strong, comfortable with who you are,’ conveying that when it comes to masculinity, both the new and Old Guard describe masculinity similarly but sometimes perform it differently. Old Guard members transposed the values of confidence and strength into a leather lifestyle that depends on their bodily performance and bodily dimensions (muscularity, not overly skinny, or what is commonly referred to as ‘twink’). They conduct this display in a nearly daily performance. Other members transposed these same values into an embrace of self-determination in more spaced out articulations of bodily performances, donning their leather for fetish night, and then hanging it back in the closet.

As Veronis (2007) contends, identities are often strategically fixed yet fluid and changing at the same time. If hyper-masculinity is simultaneously fixed and fluid in the minds of my respondents, I maintain (as do Berg & Longhurst 2003) that we should articulate the nuanced difference between how everyday folks think of masculinity—in this case my respondents—versus how social theorists conceptualize it. In leather spaces, displaying hyper-masculine qualities and fraternal bonding tends to crowd out other ontologies. This crowding allows members of the community to forget about their other lives, forge their leather identity, pursue pleasure and leisure, and importantly define what it means to be masculine. As I have previously discussed, performances of hyper-masculinity are tied to the public and private spaces that the

community inhabits. For our purposes, public spaces are places like bars and clubs. Private spaces are places like people's homes, or sometimes clubs and bars if they have a section just for the leather community. Diesel does this on Thursday nights and puts up curtains for the leather community to play; or, sometimes the community rents out the space. Thus, the dimensions of hyper-masculinity expressed by members largely depend on whether sexual acts take place in public or private spaces.

Nearly all my respondents expressed a desire to belong to a group. Belonging to a group was also a way for members to solidify their sense of hyper-masculinity or it was a way to support it. For some, group membership and coherence rely heavily on tradition, elders instructing younger members, wearing leather as often as possible, and having a strong sense of leather family history. For others, this definition relies on a blend of dimensions of masculinity exterior *and* contained within the leather community. Nayak (2003) discusses how men use space to culturally produce a particular kind of masculinity. Leather spaces, contests, and events perform a similar function in the recreation of hyper-masculinity. This enforcement springs from a devotion to notions like: muscular bodies, confidence, wearing leather often, and a knowledge and respect of the history of the community. In fact, during IML the judges chastised a contestant for mispronouncing the name, 'Tony Deblase' (the inventor of the leather pride flag). Although the contestant apologized, the judges (one of whom was Tony Deblase's ex-partner) chastised him severely. Some do not abide by this loyalty to tradition; instead, the hyper-masculinity of the community is mostly contained in leather spaces like local bars, notably The Cuff. Interestingly however, in what might be called the governmentality of the leather community, some New Guard members are self-disciplining and seeking out older members in an effort to re-establish the more hierarchical system of the pre-AIDS era. Many of my respondents noted this subtle yet

growing shift in younger, New Guard members with one noting, ‘I know many young members who are happy to be subordinate and take orders.’

I should note that none of my respondents identified as ‘New Guard.’ Others implied they were ‘Old Guard.’ Most, however, tended to define their placement on that continuum by describing what they are not. As I have previously argued, whether real or imaginary, the Old Guard/New Guard distinction is a powerful trope within the community. Each of my respondents had an opinion about this division and how hyper-masculinity circulated between the two camps; yet no one identified as purely ‘new.’ It is important that the New Guard is more of an absent presence in my data rather than an actual embodied subject. The New Guard is a way for most members to define themselves by what they are not. Therefore, while the term has importance in the community, its importance relies on its absence. Put differently, it is usually an insult or a claim that one member makes about another, or another group of members, so they can distinguish themselves as not part of the New Guard.

Moreover, while the division seemed quite clear for some of my respondents as a useful rhetorical category, many of my respondents described the Old Guard/New Guard division and hyper-masculinity as problematic, if not inescapable, descriptions. Thus, while these concepts prove problematic, their strong significance and popular usage as descriptions renders them important concepts for analysis.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have placed hyper-masculinity within Seattle’s gay, leather community. Through this placing, I have exposed the particularities of hyper-masculinity within the community. In turn, I use these particularities to speak back to conceptualization of hyper-

masculinity within geographic literature. Specifically, the particularities of the community, whether whiteness, reproducing a claimed Seattle motif, or reifying gender norms, Figure into how men perform hyper-masculinity. These performances also Figure into how men maintain or subvert that concept in the process. I have also linked these performances to understandings of history and the way the retelling of a specific type of history helps prop up the community. Connecting to these performances is the somewhat fuzzy deployment of hyper-masculinity within geographic literature. This fuzziness means we run the risk of missing the particularities of hyper-masculinity to places, as well as occluding the relationship of embodiment to hyper-masculinity. Through these processes, I offer a more place-based, nuanced conceptualization of hyper-masculinity. I accomplish this conceptualization through paying closer attention to how these men perform hyper-masculinity in Seattle's community and through using those performances to articulate an understanding of hyper-masculinity that begins with the idea of embodiment.

Chapter 5: ‘Everyone wants to belong to something’” Seattle’s gay leather community as a space of caring and uncaring

This chapter interrogates care as an action and spaces of care within the leather community. Care and hyper-masculinity are bound up with one another in this community in that demonstrating care is often viewed as masculine, if not hyper-masculine. This may seem odd for a community that celebrates stoicism and a return to ‘real men’ who ostensibly did not show much emotion. Yet, the community prides itself on showing care and many members said that caring is a manly thing to do. The dark side of this coin is (un)care—which is often mediated by hyper-masculinity. Hyper-masculinity mediates care and (un)care because it informs men on the appropriate ways to act and demonstrate emotion—or lack thereof. Indeed, some of the historical ways that men have behaved in the name of masculinity have not been caring at all. This type of uncaring may occur through the guise of overt violence, or it may rear its head under the guise of tolerating violence and a reluctance to deal with violence. At any rate, notions of care and (un)care are both bound up with hyper-masculinity in the community and this chapter explores that relationship. Ultimately, I conclude that the way these men practice care and (un)care within the community expands the definition of hyper-masculinity within this space to include care, but also reinforces dangerous and potentially violent tendencies of hyper-masculinity as some members use their sense of hyper-masculinity to justify acts of violence.

By chronicling instances of care and (un)care within the community, I argue that the community both reproduces and repudiates heteronormative and homonormative gender roles through instances of care and (un)care. Within the community, care has both positive and negative attributes that inform how men in the community think about their gender roles. As the reader will see, as is often the case, both care and (un)care can and are practiced simultaneously

and this chapter is an explanation of that simultaneity and a critique of practices of care that reproduce the self in an over-determined, autonomous being.

I link this double movement of reproduction and subversion to a neoliberal subject formation that places responsibility at the scale of the individual. This placing of responsibility is reflected in the ways the community conducts care. However, as a community that occupies a marginalized space, the leather community offers a welcoming place for those seeking and offering care that falls outside the conventional mechanisms of care giving and receiving. In this manner, care is located at the scale of the community as well as the individual. Finally, building on the previous chapters, I demonstrate how masculinity, hyper-masculinity, and sexuality, intersect in the community to furnish both a caring and uncaring community. This construction of the caring and uncaring community in turn, informs the reproduction and repudiation of traditional gender norms. By using these various forms of care, I argue two main points. First, Seattle's leather community conducts acts of care in ways that simultaneously promote and subvert traditional gender roles. Second, the community performs care in ways that challenge and push the boundaries of more conventional notions of care; this expanded notion of care often leads to instances of (un)care within the community.

A desire to belong encompasses much of what drives membership in Seattle's leather community. Hailing from all walks of life, these men (and women) converge in a space of sex that lurks in the shadows of acceptable sexual behavior. Because of its marginalized status, the community fosters a strong ethic of care as members must rely on each other. What the men in this community care for, the types of care (and as we shall see, (un)care), and what Tronto (1993) identifies as care receiving, have distinctive features associated with Seattle's gay leather community. Some of these features include: a safe place to explore kink/fetish, a place for

recovering addicts to give and receive care, comfort from abusive relationships, membership within a familial structure, and as the above quote from one of my respondents portrays, a desire ‘to belong to something.’ As a safe place for care giving and care receiving, or what Hall (2011) calls an ‘enclave,’ Seattle’s leather community reflects material and especially immaterial forms of care (Atkinson, Lawson & Wiles 2011; Brown et al. 2015) and primarily an affective form of care (Brown 2003; Conradson 2003b; Johnsen, Cloke & May 2005; Lee, Kearns & Friesen 2010).¹⁴

There are, of course, material effects of care within the community. For example, one member of the community who needed a job acquired one at ‘Doghouse Leathers,’ a local leather and fetish store, which gave him a better source of income. In other instances, pieces of leather themselves are also material objects and are often handed down to members from other members. As we shall see, however, these pieces of leather are often associated with affective and immaterial forms of care alike. Thus, by and large, I focus this chapter primarily on affective and immaterial practices of care within Seattle’s leather community as those are the types of care I most frequently encountered.

This chapter is firmly rooted in my empirics. Indeed, most of the subtitles for this chapter are quotes from my respondents or things I overheard people say. Snaking throughout the paper are the threads of identity formation, how care and (un)care occur often simultaneously with implications for gender roles, and to a slightly lesser extent, the notion of personal responsibility.

¹⁴ There is a large body of scholarship within geography that critically considers the concepts of material/immaterial and effective/affective care (Conradson 2003a; Atkinson, Lawson & Wiles 2011; Brown et al. 2015). For the purposes of this research, material care refers to tangible objects or things, whereas immaterial refers generally to emotional care. Effective care has a longstanding tradition within biomedical realm and scholars have often viewed effective care as easier to measure and sometimes more important than affective care. Affective care has more to do with experiential dimensions of care that extend beyond efficiency and effectiveness—especially outside of a biomedical context.

While formal and informal channels both structure care, the community has no formal way to deal with instances of (un)care. Thus, instances of (un)care often remain occluded even though members are willing to talk about these instances and acknowledge a need to address them. Likewise, as the reader will see, there are many instances in the section on care that later function as uncaring acts. For organizational purposes, it was easier to discuss all instances of care in one section, and then switch to instances of (un)care even though many instances function as both. Finally, the data and indeed the idea to write this chapter emerged inductively. Thus, while I was deeply and explicitly concerned with masculinity and the body within the community, care emerged as a salient concept throughout the research process.

Conceptualizations of care

Tronto (1993) provides a very detailed and useful definition of care. She conceptualizes care as,

a species of activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex life sustaining web. (pp.102)

Conradson's (2003a) succinct conceptualization of care is also useful. Conradson conceptualizes care as, 'physical and emotional labor.' Both definitions encapsulate the dimensions of care I observed in the local community. Of course, care can sometimes be a harmful action. People who care for someone may use care to manipulate or abuse the cared for. Conversely, the cared for may abuse those who take care of them (Watson et al. 2004). Because care within the community has so many dimensions, it is necessary to understand care in its myriad forms. Additionally, (un)care is sometimes the absence of care, but for our purposes, it is typically an occurrence that hinders someone from, 'maintaining, continuing, and repairing' their lives

(Tronto 1993). Thus, I incorporate both Tronto's (1993) and Conradson's (2003a) definitions as the foundation on which I conceptualize care. Care is an action in the sense that is a performance or display that allows someone to live a better life. The spaces of care are those places where those performances occur. As there are innumerable acts of care that run the gamut of care-giving, care-receiving, caring-for, and being cared-for (Tronto 1993), it is necessary for me to discuss care and (un)care in multiple ways. As a relational concept where practices and spaces of care are mutually constitutive, care also embodies scale and scope (Popke 2007). Scale, of course, inheres the closeness or distance that caring of/for someone might occur. Scope comprises the spaces where care occurs and the social relations that course through those spaces. Especially germane to this chapter is the work geographers have conducted to expose the gendered and placed nature of care (England 2000, 2010; Wiles 2003). These geographers, to name but a couple, have chronicled how care is often feminized and private. They have also demonstrated how care relations can be a source of exploitation and are bound up with gendered ideas of the family. Thus, in a community that prioritizes families, care often reflects these gendered ideas concerning families. Building on this idea, in this chapter I hope to demonstrate how care within Seattle's leather community is also placed and gendered but in a particularly masculine way.

As Brown et al. (2015) remind us, there is a body of literature outside of geography that discusses men doing care (Arber & Gilbert 1989; Kramer & Thompson 2002; Vuori 2009; Watson 2010). This literature suggests that caring on the part of men is deeply embedded in patriarchy and masculinity and because of this unique and often troublesome relationship, care presents special challenges for men. This body of work also highlights the notion that men who conduct care often must negotiate care within public *and* private spaces. For gay men, we have

often had to conduct care work (particularly in regards to finding friends and mates) in public—especially in bars (Brown 2004; Brown et al. 2015). Gay bars have long been a locus of gay culture and scholars have criticized them as spaces of rampant drug use, misogyny, transmission of STDs, meaningless sexual encounters, and spaces that reproduce homonormative social relations, *inter alia* (Field 1993; Valentine 1994; Butler 1999; Bell & Binnie 2004; Johnson & Samdahl 2005). On the other hand, gay bars are where the community meets and they function as healthy places where members congregate to reinforce bonds.

Popular discourse often presents men as lacking and women as having the tools for emotional labor. The literature on men doing care contradicts this claim. For example, there is a robust body of work concerning men caring for other men within the context of HIV/AIDS (Wrubel & Folkman 1997; Sipes, Farran, & Carol 1998; Brown 1997, 2003; Munro, 2002; Munro & Edward 2008). Care and comfort concerning HIV/AIDS and its acceptance within the local leather community is one of the principal reasons that men who are living with HIV/AIDS seek refuge there. And while the relationship between the gay men's leather community and HIV/AIDS has a long and proud history, it is not the focus of this chapter. It suffices to say that the leather community was one of the first communities to respond proactively to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s and it continues to be a beacon of acceptance and care even though many of the older members died in the wake of this disease.

Despite the welcoming and compassionate attributes of the community, there are uncaring aspects. Like the critiques of gay bars, the community can be misogynistic, racist, and privileges abled-bodies. Some of my respondents even argue that the leather community attracts predators and lends itself to, or at a minimum blurs the line between, abuse and S/M play. I will delve into these critiques in the second half of the chapter, but here I want to illustrate that the

community is contradictory when it comes to care. The reproduction of caring and uncaring spaces links up to other theorists' critiques of community that demonstrate that the progressive left over-romanticizes the notion of the community (Joseph 2002; Muller 2007). This over-romanticizing means that we miss the ways certain communities and spaces can be ostracizing. More specifically, my research also suggests that the ways in which we construct spaces of care, and the ethics that we celebrate, are also the ethics that discipline and reproduce social hierarchies and norms. To be caring is also to be uncaring. Geographers should pay more attention to this potentially contradictory tendency of spaces of care.

As I have argued elsewhere, the performances of hyper-masculinity within the community lead to a hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005) that is both supportive and subversive of homonormative gender roles. Likewise, the types of care that men are practicing here are enmeshed with their sense of masculinity; therefore, it is no surprise that members practice actions of both care and (un)care. Thus, we should remember that when these men make choices to care or (un)care, these choices are not merely their own. Instead, these men are entangled in larger structures in society, like US masculinities and neoliberal capitalism, and therefore the notion of individual choice is problematic and an oversimplification.

Care within the leather community: A place to explore kink

The ability to be masculine and explore kink in an honest and accepting space attracted many members to the leather community. As one respondent noted, 'I wanted to explore my sexuality that I had been suppressing because I've always been a good boy...I wanted to learn about kink and leather and trying to be masculine but I wanted to be honest.' Interestingly, this respondent makes almost no separation between his sexual orientation and his affinity for kink. Almost all my formal interviewees noted their attraction to the community because they wanted

to explore their kinky side. They spoke of their kinky side as something that was mostly inherent. As one respondent noted, ‘I discovered my kinky side here.’ On another occasion at a local contest I overheard one member exclaim, ‘either you are born kinky or you’re not.’ Indeed, another respondent told me of a friend of his that was ‘suspicious of those who become kinky later in life.’ For my respondents, the leather community was a conduit through which they explored and identified their nascent kinkiness.

At numerous contests and in casual conversations I overheard people laud how accepting the community is of various kinks and even how sometimes people need to explore kink to find out what fetish they like. Through my conversations with respondents, I understood that kink signified mostly a general inclination—not a specific fetish. Thus, while some scholars (Butler 2004) would likely argue that all fetish and ways of being kinky have already been articulated, for many of the members in the local community, your kink and fetish identity is something to which you are predisposed but also something you can fashion and forge. One notion that nearly everyone agreed on was that the leather community was the safest and perhaps the best place they had found to explore their kink identity.

A safe place to forge one’s kink identity links up with geographies of care that underscore how members in a community may better improve their and others’ lives through creating more appropriate support networks within communities (Hall 2011; Straughan 2012). For example, at several local contests and at one contest in San Francisco, members discussed the need for greater acceptance and support of ‘race-play.’¹⁵ Considering that Seattle’s gay

¹⁵ Race-play is an increasingly accepted form of sexual interaction where participants eschew most if not all forms of political correctness concerning race in favor of achieving sexual gratification. There are other types of what we may call avant-garde play that incorporate taboo topics into their sexual lexicon to enhance the sexual experience. For example, ‘poz-play’ is where members, ostensibly HIV positive men, actively incorporate language concerning their status into their sexual experiences. Finally, I should also add that I have seen white *and* black men advocate for greater acceptance of race play.

leather community is comprised mostly of white men—indeed most communities around the United States are—the call for greater acceptance of the use of racially pejorative terms during sexual encounters is a paradox of the community. I say paradox because while we may expect racism in a community that is nearly all white, the community is very vocal about being anti-racist. Should we praise the call for greater acceptance of race-play as a move toward greater acceptance of kink and therefore an instance of caring for others' differences? Or, should we condemn it as insensitive or even racist—especially considering the recent spate of white police violence against black lives and the 'Black Lives Matter' movement? These are tough questions, especially when we consider that participants of race-play are consenting adults. But if care is associated with systems of social support (Atkinson, Lawson & Wiles 2011), in other words a safe place to explore kink, then this type of avant-garde fetish appears to be caring. On the other hand, what this type of fetish demonstrates is that so-called caring spaces and actions can reinscribe certain power imbalances and hierarchies. Overall, however, the leather community as a space is welcoming of many types of behavior and, from an internal perspective, many members would call race-play and other forms of politically charged play as examples of caring.

Another example of a fetish in the leather community that pushes the boundaries of what constitutes care is the fantasy of rape. It is no secret that the community is largely predicated on heavy S/M behavior (Weiss 2011). This behavior pulls from larger discourses of power and/or instances of power imbalance that circulate in society. Rape is certainly an instance of power imbalance that has been fetishized within the community. One respondent told me a story:

R: One of the best things I ever did as a dominant was that this guy online wanted me to come over and rape him...I came in and I hit him. And I knew where to hit him where it wouldn't do damage but it would be actually stimulating, so I did that. I tore my shirt off and then I gagged his mouth.

I: You had discussed all of this ahead of time?

R: Yes. We had discussed all of this ahead of time, well ahead of time. I got full permission...he wanted me to stay with him for the night and I was like, 'fuck you! Is this rape or not?'

We cannot designate the above rape fantasy as purely rape because both parties are willing. For this reason, I refer to this fantasy as *simulated rape*. I want to be very careful here. I am deeply ambivalent about whether an act such as *simulated rape* can ever be a task of care. My respondents believe that *simulated rape* can be a task of care; so, in some instances it may have caring features associated to it. For reasons I elucidate below, however, conceptualizing *simulated rape* as only a task of care—even within the context of the leather community—is dangerous. I urge the reader to keep this strong admonishment about *simulated rape* while they continue reading. Nevertheless, I refer to this fantasy as *simulated rape*. One interpretation is that the community is appropriating the terrible crime of rape, the power and gender relations that overlay rape, and using a fantasy version of it for sexual gratification. According to many of my respondents, the gratification stems from the desire to feel dominant and dominated. Both subjectivities somehow suffuse the participants' sense of masculinity. One respondent said he felt, 'manly' after conducting a *simulated rape* session.

Why has this fantasy gained such traction within the community? I argue that we can trace the popularity of this fantasy back to the notion that the community is a safe place to explore what some might deem as aberrant sexual actions but those same aberrant sexual actions clearly have a lot of power and attraction otherwise. Furthermore, *simulated rape* offers these men a figurative space to perform a type of masculinity (predicated on taboo social practices) they may only fantasize about but never realize for various reasons. As I discussed in Chapter 2,

hyper-masculinity is a key concept for the community. Rape mobilizes this concept and, through a sex act that is heavily reliant on domination, *simulated rape* allows members to perform hyper-masculinity in an extreme manner. Rape is also deeply intertwined with patriarchy and masculinity (Mantilla 2002; Murnen, Wright & Kaluzny 2002; Zurbriggen 2010) and clearly has overtones of power and submission. Such overtones, and indeed binaries, link up with other binaries within the community, such as: top/bottom, dominant/submissive, daddy/boy, and master/slave. In this way, the ethic of care within the community revolves around reifying already existing power relations but transforming them in a way that is acceptable within certain parameters. Rape play's transformation into an acceptable act occurs because all participants are consenting and willing. The explicit desire and agreement for a rape fantasy makes for a space that removes some of the power imbalance between participants. To be clear, the power imbalance is what attracts many folks to the fantasy. The notion of consent, however, removes that part of rape—unwilling violation—which is arguably the most damaging. What is left is a very loose approximation of rape; a watered-down version that plays with existing power imbalances but is incapable of completely reproducing them.

Nevertheless, rape is enmeshed with patriarchy. Does this entanglement with patriarchy mean that such fantasies, and by extension the community, reproduce patriarchy writ large? In short, yes. The community is, however, self-conscious about this danger of reproduction even while attempting to reproduce parts of the taboo surrounding rape. Many of the members I spoke with understood that they were cueing off a harmful practice, but as the above respondent later noted, 'there is a difference between doing that in role-play and real life.' Another respondent noted that, 'it isn't rape because we both wanted it.' These attitudes suggest that the idea of *simulated rape* is a self-reflexive maneuver. It simultaneously adopts the form of a terribly

harmful practice all the while realizing that it is not that practice at all. Through the appropriation of a harmful practice and then its de-legitimization through consent, *simulated rape* renders itself relatively innocuous. The space of the community makes this type of transformation possible and even welcome because it allows for the appropriation and subsequent de-legitimization of otherwise forbidden practices.

There are numerous other examples of fetishes and kink play (needle play, bondage, flogging, etc.) that also demonstrate how the community is a welcoming space for otherwise deviant sexual behavior (though just how deviant some of these behaviors are outside of the community is anybody's guess). I chose the above two examples (race play and *simulated rape*) because they obviously confront very salient problems in our culture. The celebration of derogatory racial terms and *simulated rape* within the community challenges us in deeply personal and visceral ways. This celebration also might appear to contravene the political goals of critical race theory and feminist geography. The appropriation of derogatory racial terms and rape within the community, however, does not foreclose the goals of critical race theorists and feminist geographers. Rather, what this appropriation conveys is that care takes many different forms and the validity of care is contingent on the spaces in which people practice it.

The familial structure of the community as a mechanism of care

Families or clans, have been a feature of the leather community since its inception. As one respondent noted,

There used to be a lot more of these little things that were more formal like the Dragon clan. They don't formally exist anymore. They now exist as like, families... There is the Ethos family here in Seattle, which [mentions a name] has the alpha and then he has the boys and subs below that. There are other families

that have not gone so far as to give themselves a name but you recognize them when they are at events together or things like that.

While clans or more formal structures might not exist as prevalently as they once did (according to the respondent above) the family structures that do exist often have well-developed hierarchies. These hierarchies often reflect hyper-patriarchal and hyper-masculine social relations. For example, the Daddy may be the head of the household and his boys will often cook, clean, and generally take care of the housekeeping. This type of structuring is another example of the reproduction of a social norm where there is a dominant male as the head of the household. Yet, care in the space of these families flows both from the top down as well as the bottom up. The Daddy often provides material care in the form of money, a place to live, and food. He may also provide immaterial forms of care where the boys or subs feel safe and taken care of emotionally. Immaterially, the boys may provide the Daddy (sometimes referred to as dom or alpha) with a sense of ownership and a heightened sense of masculinity that the Daddy can exercise through the means of his domination—a domination, however, that the boys freely confer upon him through their surrender of authority. As I stated earlier, though, this surrounding and seizing of power is not a simple, individual choice. The men in these relationships are bound up with other discourses and norms like personal responsibility and hyper-masculinity. We must understand their ‘choices’ as stemming from their embeddedness in the larger social milieu. Thus, power does not reside in the dominant as a top-down only force. Instead, the Daddy(s) and the subordinates render the circulation of power through a type of Foucauldian disciplinary power (Foucault 1978) of the self, by the self, where both parties are beholden to the other in a ceaseless dialectic of seizure and surrender.

Additionally, an analysis of these family structures also links up with geographies of care that critique care as a practice that frames the individual as autonomous, independent, and self-

actualized (Sevenhuijsen 2003; Smith 2005; Johnsen, Cloke & May 2005). Contrary to being independent or autonomous, the boys or subs in many of these families rely on an affective notion of dependency to suffuse their emotional needs. The boys in these families may have some measure of independence, but the very practice of care within these families centers on at least the appearance, if not actual, need for dependence and reliance on the Daddy/dom (and sometimes the other boys in the family). Subordinate members of these families willingly subscribe to dependent relationships. This style of relationship problematizes neoliberal discourses that frame the healthy individuals as self-actualized and autonomous (Mol 2008), a theme I will return to later. When describing this sense of need or reliance, one respondent noted, ‘it seems weird to a lot of people these days that are like, “No. I am a free bird. All of my decisions are mine.” Then they realize there are people who really kind of like that narrow, guided life. And they find an acceptance in the leather community and in families for that kind of lifestyle.’ This is not to suggest that the Daddy/dom is completely independent or somehow operates exteriorly to this dynamic; instead, the complex dynamic of care with its undertones of dependence in the spaces of the leather family helps the Daddy/dom feel more masculine by affording him a sense of authority—even if that sense of authority is somewhat illusory. Still, the boys listen to him and follow his orders. As one respondent succinctly put it, ‘I’m in charge and that makes me feel like a man.’

Dependence is not the only feature of families within the community. More generally, the sense of belonging is also very alluring to members of the community. As one of my female respondents noted,

There really is a kind of family/community component. I’m not a member of a family or clan...but there really is a larger sense of community and family even if you’re not a member. I consider people who I am very close to, they are my family. And there are a lot of people who are like me. They are not close or even

outright estranged from their blood relatives or who have come and gone through some sort of crisis.

As we see from above, the concept of the family functions on two different levels. First, the highly hierarchical families allow for more dependence where members willingly embrace reliance and subordination as positive attributes to enhance their life. Adding to this, the concept of the family, while not as structured or hierarchical, operates through a general sense of belonging and acceptance where members see the entire community as more like a surrogate family that accepts you where your blood relatives may not. As one respondent noted, ‘some of the people who are here had no place else to go.’

Care as a system of support

Many respondents discussed a guiding principle of comfort or shelter from past hardship within the community. As one would expect, the hardships from which people seek refuge take many forms. Members have conducted acts of caring for others seeking refuge in myriad ways. While there are numerous examples of acts of caring for others in this context, I have chosen two that I find particularly poignant.

The first instance is the case of a welcoming couple. One of my female respondents told me this story. She remembered a couple having the good reputation of taking in new members to the community who need help. She explained that when she was new to Seattle, she felt lonely. She did not know a lot of people and wanted to make friends. She explained,

So I met this person and he and his partner kind of took me in as sort of, “oh this [mentions names].” They are good harborers of people in the community of all kinds: newcomers, others. Sometimes they bring in really young people who show up kind of like lost little lambs. Sometimes they give them a place to stay, you know, room and board there for a while until they either get on their feet or they fail to launch and then they leave.

Such examples of immaterial and material care abound within the community. Moreover, this example also challenges the neoliberal notion of the individual as the main, or even only, site for change and the embodiment of personal responsibility (Staeheli & Brown 2003; England 2007; Boyer and England 2008). These theorists demonstrate that change occurs through various channels and systems in which we are embedded. These connections and systems of support that new members make within the community demonstrate that change or what we might call ‘moments toward self-fulfillment’ occur at a range of scales, including the individual but also the networks in which that individual seeks support. Put simply, the notion that one must pull themselves up by their bootstraps is not very salient within the leather community.

Of course, the discourse of personal responsibility, where members trumpet ‘doing things for yourself’ as one respondent remarked, is present. We should be careful not to equate the notions of taking some measure of ownership over one’s choices, however, with the conceptualization of the individual as nearly completely autonomous and purposefully negotiating the world through a highly-atomized existence. Rather, the community places an individual’s ability to change their life within systems of support, what Tronto (1993) calls, ‘a complex, life sustaining web.’ One respondent reinforced this idea of a system of support when he said, ‘this is a community where you can let your freak flag fly. Mostly people don’t judge here and you’ll probably find someone else that likes what you like.’ Other members echoed this theme of acceptance and support. And this support did not only hinge on acceptance of sexual fetishes. One respondent told me that he could live above Doghouse Leathers for a reduced rate and that helped him pay bills.

This system of support, however, also hinges on one’s social, cultural, and (to some degree) economic capital (Bourdieu 2007) within the community at large. Clearly, one’s ability

to accumulate and then mobilize these forms of capital largely depends upon other abilities that are more squarely placed within a neoliberal context. Thus, attractiveness, masculinity, body type, and personality (to name but a few) are key qualities. Moreover, these qualities have strong links to neoliberal discourses that privilege white, attractive, masculine, physically fit men. Often these men use these qualities to exhibit confidence through gregariousness and force of personality, thus allowing, at least in part, for the success or demise of newcomers to the community.

Suicide is the other example of how the community is a nurturing space. Scholars have chronicled the plague of suicide within the LGBTQ community more generally (McNaught & Spicer 2000; Cover 2013; Davis, Royne Stafford & Pullig 2014) and suicide within the leather community appears to be as prevalent. Indeed, as I conducted my interviews I noticed that many of my respondents discussed suicide very forthrightly. This forthrightness led me to question how members felt about suicide and its prevalence. When I asked one older, prominent member of Seattle's leather community about suicide, he responded with,

R: One of the biggest epidemics we are dealing with right now is not only drug use but suicide, or suicide and depression. We've lost a couple of members this year to suicide.

I: When you say 'members,' are you talking about the LGBTQ community or the leather community?

R: The leather community particularly [points to a picture of a man in leather gear on his wall in his office]. We lost a current Daddy's boy and that hit very hard.

I: Has suicide hit the leather community harder than other groups?

R: No, I wouldn't say it has hit it harder. We are just being more open and communicating about it and sharing and taking care of each other.

This openness highlights a theme where at first glance, certain issues seem more widespread within the leather community than in other communities. As one respondent noted, ‘there’s a long tradition of being open about your personal, I don’t know if shortcomings is the right word but for lack of a better word, shortcomings.’ The example of suicide therefore, portrays an ethic of trust and honesty that circulates within the community. This ethic, in turn, molds the leather community as a space where people willingly and freely speak of their ‘shortcomings’ with a frequency and transparency that does not exist in many other communities. In turn, this frequency and transparency leads to the perception that the leather community deals with more suffering and grief than other communities. I understand this suffering and grief, not by its prevalence, but because of its high visibility.

While it would be difficult to determine the suicide rate within the leather community (especially on any scale beyond the local) versus suicide rates among those who identify as gay men locally or nationally, for example, dealing with suicide is clearly an important issue within the community. Whether the leather community and suicide have anything to do with one another causally is not at issue here. What is important is that the community rallies around its members quickly and fervently and is thus a space where members seek and take care of each other. One example of this strong rallying ability occurred at Doghouse on a Monday night, several years back. One respondent stated that,

Word was going out even before all the family had been notified. You know kind of the same thing here. We had [mentions name] who committed suicide. Word went out. “You need comfort? Go to Doghouse.” On a Monday night, suddenly there are fifty people out here taking care of each other.

The response to suicide within the community not only reflects the cohesiveness of its members but also the fact that care occurs within myriad spaces within the community, and these spaces may have a multitude of purposes. For example, Doghouse is primarily a leather/fetish store, but

on that fateful Monday night, it served as a place for mourning. The Cuff is another space that members use for socializing, as well as for charity events and leather contests—all of which simultaneously promote the larger ethic of care. Beyond occurring in multiple spaces, the above example also demonstrates that care as an action occurs both proximately and distantly (Milligan & Wiles 2010) within the community as members both care for those in the local community as well as those in distant communities¹⁶.

Care as comfort from abuse

Another theme that inductively emerged through the research process was a theme centered on comfort from abuse. Several of my respondents had either direct or indirect experience with abusive relationships. My argument is twofold: first, the openness and the frankness of the community is mainly why those who have suffered at the hand of an abuser seek care and comfort within the community: second, because of the BDSM nature of the community, it attracts predators who justify abuse under the guise of BDSM relationships. Whether the community attracts predators and then people seek refuge from those predators because they are already members in the community or the other way around is indeterminate. Instead, I argue that the community attracts both—with the understanding that many of the sufferers were already active participants in the leather community. Later in this chapter, I will address the issue of abuse as uncare; for now, I investigate how the community is refuge from abuse.

I say, ‘sufferer’ because all the members to whom I spoke rejected the label of victim. One woman I spoke to said, ‘...yeah I have that capacity in me, so to speak, to be a victim. And I

¹⁶ Distant care typically occurs through emails, offers to help with money or emotional support, phone calls, and going to visit someone.

don't like to use the word *victim*, right?...And nobody wants to use the word victim.' The rejection of the word *victim* is more than merely semantic here. The rejection shows a complete disavowal of the concept that sometimes one has little to no control over a situation, or what one respondent describes as, 'taking ownership' over what happened. Taking ownership and rejecting the notion of victimhood, however, is a double-edged sword. On one hand, taking ownership over being abused garners what some of my respondents expressed was a sense of empowerment (none of my respondents used that word specifically, though they spoke about taking ownership and not allowing the abuser to maintain any control over them in the future).

I characterize 'taking ownership' and a rejection of being a victim as another form of personal responsibility. Self-help books, popular media discourses, and even the language of therapy have bombarded us with the notion that to survive, we must take ownership over our lives and not think of ourselves as victims. When I asked several respondents what taking ownership meant, they all spoke of: having power over the situation, not allowing a previous experience to dominate their lives, and not allowing someone they used to know influence them in a harmful way. In combination with popular discourse, their answers suggest that taking ownership is a choice. Taking ownership or not allowing a previous experience to dominate one's life is certainly an example of a 'moment of self-fulfillment.' Moreover, members noted that the community encouraged speaking about these experiences. The ability to speak about these feelings of empowerment is an example of the comfort from abuse that the community provides.

The other side of taking ownership is that choice reinscribes notions of personal responsibility. These notions of personal responsibility place much of the onus of abuse onto the victim. It is the victim's responsibility to assume ownership over the abuse. Such a tendency

therefore produces citizens who internalize this narrative. It casts the idea of being a victim back onto the sufferer through the language of taking ownership. Our population is thus trained through the technology or regime of ‘self-help’ to assume responsibility, even for things like abuse. Again, the idea of ‘choice’ within the context of neoliberal subjectivity and personal responsibility rears its head because now, sufferers of abuse are faced with the ostensible choice of either taking ownership, or being a victim.

The effects of this interplay between taking ownership and personal responsibility made it difficult to understand and categorize abuse. My respondents vacillated between speaking about abuse as though it certainly happened and then questioning whether it actually happened; this was especially true within the context of a BDSM relationship. The supposed ‘taking ownership’ through the rejection of the word *victim* folds into other geographers’ critiques of the discourse of personal responsibility and landscapes of care that reproduce the norm of the autonomous and self-determining individual (Mckie, Gregory & Bowlby 2002; McDowell et al. 2005). Put differently, if one can take ownership, then one has control and is self-determining. None of this analysis is meant to take away from the coping mechanism(s) of sufferers of abuse. Indeed, many of respondents expressed a greater sense of peace concerning any abuse they might have suffered because of taking ownership. However, my aim here is to argue that the idea of taking ownership can simultaneously be a cathartic discourse for my respondents as well as a biopolitical maneuver to fashion the self as an autonomous, disciplining individual. The result is a community whose members celebrate being unconventional while reproducing the narrative of personal responsibility via the rhetoric of taking ownership. Therefore, through the appropriation of abuse vis-à-vis the role play of dominants and submissives, the community ironically places itself squarely within homonormative social relations. Thus, tasks of care regarding comfort from

abuse and the appropriation of abuse within the BDSM context render the community both unconventional and conventional. This ironic tendency suggests that, in communities that practice tasks of care based on the appropriation of social relations with extreme power imbalances (like rape and abuse), those tasks of care can never just be tasks of care. Instead, the tasks of care reproduce the very power imbalances they seek to disrupt. In this case, through tasks of care concerning abuse, the community places itself both as an unconventional space and a conventional one.

Likewise, BDSM kink/fetish play complicates identifying abuse. As one woman told me:

I did end up talking to this woman for a while who had this incident happen and [mentions name] had told me about it. She was actually talking about taking ownership of that word [victim] with some therapy that she was in and stuff and I was like even that makes me feel squiggly because you know was she abused? Yeah I mean words like abuse and rape start to get really squiggly when you're in a D/S context right? And it starts to become very questionable, and it gets questionable in your own head.

While this type of testimony speaks in part to the interior, psychological classification of abuse in a BDSM context, what I am more interested in (as a geographer) is how the leather community is an exterior reflection of this internal, liminal space and how the community deals with instances of abuse. The community inheres this type of ambiguity regarding abuse but it also has informal methods to deal with abuse. When speaking of handling abuse, my respondents cited talking with people as the primary way to deal with it. A few respondents talked about discussing their experience after the abuse occurred. Others noted discussing abuse with victims after the abuse occurred. Some, however, relayed stories of warning others in the community. And no one told me that someone warned them of a possible abusive person/situation. All of the conversations concerning abuse were after the fact.

The fetishization of certain types of activities, like hitting and degradation as acts of caring, further complicates identifying abuse. Although not all members in the community may subscribe to such acts, the ones that do find acceptance and little judgement concerning this behavior. The community, therefore, turns conventional definitions of caring on their head. The conundrum is that it is difficult to draw the line between tasks of care and acts of uncaring. In other words, BDSM encounters and D/S relationships often camouflage or muddy the concept of abuse. Put differently, how do we identify abuse in relationships that are predicated on extreme power imbalances and what we would otherwise call physical violence?

Most of my respondents noted 'consent' as a determining factor that draws the line between welcome and unwelcome physical advances. In addition, for those considering a play session it is de rigueur to discuss the specifics of the session ahead of time. One woman told me that she, 'discusses everything ahead of time. Where, when, who, how, how much...' Discussing the session ahead of time certainly wards off potential ambiguity or unwelcome physical advances. Indeed, there are often DMs (Dungeon Masters) who supervise play sessions to make sure everything goes smoothly.

Friendships, which are obviously an important dimension to community, are another method members use to cope with abuse. When one member asked a female friend to attend an event, the friend told me,

I probably wouldn't have done it for just like a frivolous social thing but this is a person that has been going through a really shitty time with a D/S relationship. He's really like suffering in that and I totally understand that because I've been there right and I know what it's like to be around people and have new energy and things like that and I was like, 'well okay.'

This is an excellent example of what Tronto (1993) calls, ‘caring about’ and ‘taking care of.’ In fact, through my participation and interviews with the community, I witnessed many such instances of care. In regards to the same person who, ‘was going through a really shitty time’ another respondent told me that he also joined this person at a separate event. My respondent said, ‘I wanted to make sure he felt comfortable. He has gone through something bad and I want to be there for him.’ These instances of care fall more along the lines of what we might call a conventional ethic of care that conforms to pre-existing norms of what it means to care for and about others (and that care is intrinsically good).

Behavior (one of the dimensions of hyper-masculinity) also informed how my respondents discussed abuse. As I noted in my conceptualization of hyper-masculinity, two indicators of hyper-masculine behavior are honesty and frankness. In other words, to perform hyper-masculinity is to be honest and frank, and men displayed these tendencies when discussing abuse. One respondent, who had been in a self-described abusive relationship averred,

They say that you’re only as bad as your worst secret and if you want to get through an abusive relationship or trauma as being a gay man or whatever...you got to talk about it. You’ve got to be honest about it and that’s what I like about being a man about it. And that’s what I like about being a man. My father said to me when I was young, ‘a man is no more or less than his word and his character is based on that.’

Here we see a performance of hyper-masculinity lending itself to frankness and honesty. Instead of occluding the trauma associated with abuse, performances of hyper-masculinity function to demystify it. In fact, there are other examples where members speak of abuse and preface their statements with, ‘as men, we need to talk about this subject.’ In nearly every discussion I had concerning abuse, men cited their understanding of masculinity as a key to discussing abuse. Prefacing comments concerning abuse with statements about masculinity demonstrates that to

discuss abuse without performing masculinity might render one non-masculine. This prefacing also suggests that abuse is coded as feminine. It is something that only happens to women. To dissuade me of their femininity, my respondents legitimized discussion of abuse by prefacing them with rhetorical performances of masculinity. I take this to mean that members understand that being a man might preclude discussing abuse. Thus, by claiming it masculine to discuss abuse, these members rhetorically initiate the subject of abuse within the purview of acceptable, masculine topics.

I witnessed another mechanism of coping in the ritual of passing leather on to someone else. There is a strong tradition of handing leather down from one person to the next. Often one member gives another member many of the most valuable pieces in their repertoire. As I have discussed elsewhere, pieces of leather are not merely material objects for the community, they are representations of emotions. They may represent love and caring, but sometimes they may also represent negative emotions or be associated with the trauma surrounding abuse. One example of this negative association is one respondent's story about a past partner. She explained that many years ago, she was in an emotionally and physically abusive relationship. She went on to explain that, once she and her male partner broke up, he abandoned his leathers. When speaking of this abandonment, my respondent said she did not know what to do with all the leather. She states,

To me it was just proof of how little this person was actually connected to the leather community. They abandoned their leathers...there were so many things that were hard about that relationship but I looked at that stuff and part of me was like, it was so hard to have anything in the house at all from them. Then I understood that there is a ritual for this in the community, right? That there is a way to handle this, which is: you have these things that are valuable but now they, you can't keep them. They have a bad energy for you, right? How can I have that like bad energy be pushed out of them and be given a new life? I was able to do that [give them to someone else] and that was really awesome...The circle of

energy comes and goes in the community and the physical things we pass along are representations of that.

Recovering from substance abuse as seeking care

In Seattle's community, three of my respondents were in recovery from substance abuse. The rest of my respondents all knew several people who were also in recovery from substance abuse. One prominent member went so far as to say that the leather community 'was a good place for those in recovery.' In years past, various titleholders have made addiction part of their platform and, combined with the community's welcoming attitude (or, as one respondent noted, its tendency to attract 'freaks and kinks!'), some people seek refuge within the community as they recover from addiction. My respondents emphasized how the community facilitates discussions and openness surrounding addiction and recovery. As one respondent was keen to point out, 'The same people [people in recovery] are out there in the other communities, but you just don't see them. Here, oftentimes they will use their leather, their play, as a way or a tool to help them recover.' In this instance, the community is about facilitating sexual interaction, but also about engendering a welcoming and non-judgmental atmosphere that in some way supplants the role that drugs previously played in some of these men's lives.

Addiction and recovery vary from alcoholism to methamphetamines. Methamphetamine (also known as crystal meth, or more colloquially as Tina), however, has been an especially crippling drug for the leather community and for the gay community in general. Geographers have been too reticent about the interplay between drug use and sex with Del Casino's work (2007, 2012) as the notable exception. And while a nuanced discussion of the relations of human and non-human actors concerning sex and drugs is beyond the scope of this paper, we can say that the relationship of leather (non-human actor) to sexual/human actors plays a critical role in

helping those in recovery deal with their addiction. Additionally, most of my respondents who are in recovery speak about their addiction as preceding their involvement in the community. One respondent explained that he used drugs before and during his involvement in the community. The other two respondents also cited their long history of involvement with substances that predated their involvement with the community. Thus, while drug use certainly occurs within the local leather community, in general the community is a space that welcomes and attracts those in recovery rather than facilitating drug use within it.

Extremely kinky sex play is a factor that helps members in recovery deal with addiction. While none of my respondents went so far as to say that they traded drugs for leather, some say that extreme kink/play in the community loosely approximates the high that drugs previously provided. One respondent noted that the pain he experienced in various sexual play sessions was not like the high he experienced when he was using, but the pain did, 'get my blood flowing!' Another respondent claimed that play sessions allowed him to focus and they occupied his otherwise short attention span. He claimed that play sessions were a distraction from the rest of his life. He also explained that drugs used to be a distraction but now his play is the distraction. No doubt those members in the leather community find comfort in other spaces geared toward recovery, but the leather community merges sexual interaction and recovery in a unique way that stimulates participants in healthy, non-addictive ways. And while sex addiction is an issue in the leather community, I am unclear and do not have data that speaks to whether it is a worse problem within the leather community than other communities or society at large.

The leather community is appealing as a refuge because it attempts to undo much of the stigmatization surrounding addiction. This undoing of stigma generally occurs through talking about addiction candidly. At IML, one of the contestant's platform revolved around addiction

and recovery. This destigmatization is both incidental and purposeful. Indeed, what it means to be a good and productive citizen is recapitulated when members discuss seizing responsibility for their lives and choices in light of addiction. Again, seizing responsibility harkens back to ‘taking ownership’ over one’s life. Interestingly, there was an undercurrent of rejection concerning the conventional thinking surrounding abuse. For example, one of my respondents in recovery for drug addiction claimed, ‘just because I was addicted to one drug doesn’t mean I am addicted to all drugs or alcohol.’ Another respondent in recovery did not use any drugs or alcohol but also did not believe in the 12-step program and admitted that some of his friends in recovery manage to have healthy relationships with alcohol despite their drug addiction. I am hesitant to cast the rejection of the traditional logic of recovery as simultaneous rejections of neoliberal discourses of personal responsibility. Additionally, these two members spoke about an increased sense of agency in being able to control their addiction so thoroughly.

On the other hand, the aspect of kinky sex play with potentially multiple partners subverts heteronormativity and homonormativity. Moreover, there are competing ideas about recovery from addiction that circulate in the local community. Some members subscribe to conventional 12-step programs while others eschew the thinking and language of such programs as, ‘too much about god,’ or too absolute in their insistence of abstaining from all drug and alcohol use. In fact, one member I spoke to who is in recovery for methamphetamines will take pain pills that doctors prescribe and, so far, has not suffered any relapse. What is important here is that the way members cope with addiction conforms and denies traditional understandings of addiction that link to neoliberal notions of personal responsibility while still allowing the members to feel as though they are in control of their addiction.

The uncaring community

Until now, we have witnessed how care (both material and immaterial) within the community manifests itself in different contexts. The other side of this coin is uncaring. Surprisingly, these instances of uncaring within the community are often intertwined with acts of caring. Two main instances through which members express an ethic of uncare are misogyny and abuse. The expression of these two phenomena occurs at the scales of the individual and the community at large. The embodiment and reaction to abuse and misogyny at the individual and community-wide scales complicates how scholars might interpret those two concepts in this space. Further, because members occupy both a neoliberal subjectivity that squarely locates responsibility at the individual level (Mol 2008; England 2010; Green & Lawson 2011) and a subjectivity within the local community that extends responsibility and care to a community-wide scale, the concepts of misogyny and especially abuse are both locatable at the individual scale but also fragmented and diffused to the larger scale of the community. This fragmentation and diffusion makes it difficult to map and define instances of misogyny and especially abuse.

Misogyny within the community as an instance of uncare

Along with varying scale, the scope of misogyny occurs at varying levels. Misogyny is yet another method that some men use to territorialize space and perform hyper-masculinity. By castigating women, spaces are made purer and male-centric. No one said these exact words, but their comments spoke around the notion that excluding women is a way to include men. It is analogous to the men who are feeling anxious vis-à-vis the crisis in masculinity about women entering the workforce. Now, the anxiety revolves around women are entering leisure spaces. Because misogyny and patriarchy are intertwined, some scholars may consider the below

examples as more evidentiary of misogyny versus patriarchy, or vice versa. These nuanced differences aside, what is clear is that members of the community marginalize women (even though not all women have a vagina, it is the perception and subsequent embodiment of being a woman that matters more here) or render them nearly invisible within the community. As one respondent articulated:

I mean if they're not going around and saying, 'oh you know she shouldn't be here and all those guys who hang out with her you know shouldn't hang out with her or they should tell her to leave.' I've never gotten that kind of vibe. It's more like I don't really see you because you have a vagina (laughs)! It's like a vagina of invisibility, which is better than someone hating on you because you have a vagina, right?

The social hierarchy that courses through the community comes into play here. I specifically asked all of my self-identified male respondents whether they had female (or women) friends and all of them said 'yes.' Even some of the men who argue for men-only spaces valued friendships with people of other genders. Yet the overlay and performances of hyper-masculinity onto and within the local community tend to marginalize women. Both of my female respondents as well as several women I spoke to at IML and Folsom stated that they understood that there were male-only spaces—that because they were women (or perceived to be so) they were not allowed in certain spaces. Some of the spaces they cited were: Real Bad (a dance party at Folsom), the dance parties at IML, and certain bars like Diesel in Seattle. The dance parties are hyper-masculine spaces where the behavioral indicators of sex, alcohol/drug consumption, displays of sexual preference, and sexual aggression are vivid and intense. In some of the dance parties there are rooms where sex occurs. In general, most of the men at these parties have their shirts off, they tend to be sweaty, and there is a lot of making out and groping. Diesel in Seattle shows

pornographic images on its televisions, caters to the bear and muscle bear crowd, and is also a place where public displays of sex acts occur. As many of the women told me, these types of behaviors make these spaces rather uncomfortable for them.

The above descriptions of hyper-masculine spaces demonstrate that marginalization does not typically occur at the scope of overt violence. Instead, it is an asserted indifference that structurally configures the community as a place of invisibility for women. Superimpose the glorification of strict gender roles for Tops/Bottoms, Doms/subs that align with more conventional gender roles between men and women, and there is a deep irony here. On one hand, the community considers itself a welcoming space that proudly defies heteronormative gender roles. On the other hand, the community simultaneously incorporates those very traditional norms concerning gender, and this incorporation marginalizes women.

Certain clubs like SML (Seattle Men in Leather) are leisure spaces specifically geared toward men. Their bylaws do not preclude women's involvement but the title of the organization alone is at least partly exclusionary. Does the leisurely aspect of SML and many of the bars where the men's leather community congregates make them any less patriarchal? Geographers debate these very questions concerning gay bars (Valentine 1994; Johnson & Samdahl 2005) and argue that they are, indeed, patriarchal and misogynistic. Applying these same arguments to the spaces of the leather community signifies that in one context it too reproduces patriarchy. Take for example, the mission statement of Seattle Men in Leather, which reads: 'A Gay Men's Social Group Promoting with Power and Pride, the Seattle Men's Leather Community.' *Power* is an especially charged word here. Power certainly undergirds hyper-masculinity and almost seems to jump out at the reader in the mission statement. Power also begs the questions: Power to do what? Power over what? Power over whom? Again, while women are not explicitly excluded

from the club, one may read the subtext of the mission statement as unwelcoming of women or at least ignoring them. And as I have previously argued, the community is predicated on extreme power imbalances. In contrast, consider SWL's (Seattle Women in Leather) inclusion statement which reads:

The Seattle Women in Leather Organization, in its entirety, is open to any person, twenty-one years (21) of age or older, who believes they have a place in the women's community. SWL does not discriminate on any basis including, but not limited to, gender, gender expression, sexuality, national origin, disability, race, or religion.

The instances of excluding women may be isolated, but they are powerful. They nevertheless do not reflect the prevailing attitude of acceptance toward women. We should also keep in mind that where women are welcomed (or not) depends on the space. For example, there are certain sex parties that go on for men and, while one of my female respondents 'knows where all that happens,' she also maintains that she would never attend one of those gatherings. As I have previously argued, these gatherings/parties also tend to happen in more private spaces, like someone's home. Through my interviews and participant observation, moreover, I found that attendance by women was typically higher in more public spaces and events. These events may have had sexual undertones but they tended to have other purposes such as: fundraising, celebrating someone's birthday, annual parties and contests, etc. Thus, while women were not completely excluded from sexual gatherings in private spaces, their presence was far more noteworthy in more public, multi-purpose spaces. Interestingly, it is as if their womanly features, the perception of them having a vagina so to speak, made them too visible in private spaces. Thus, their visibility could only be had in public and then, only by those who wanted to see them.

Abuse as uncare within the community

While there is much to say on this issue, my goal here is to offer a brief critique of how the community deals (or does not deal) with abuse and how the concept of abuse links up to hyper-masculinity within the community. This linking makes abuse an especially difficult topic for the community to tackle. When I asked my respondents about the prevalence of abuse in the community, nearly all of them said it is an issue the community needs to address more adequately, with one stating, ‘you could do a whole project on that.’ Yet discussing the concept also made some of my respondents uncomfortable. Several respondents had noticeable changes in body languages like crossing their arms, or leaning away from me. Moreover, if we have given consent, someone can still cross a line and physical/sexual advances can become unwanted for a variety of reasons. One respondent even noted, ‘I mean words like *abuse* and *rape* start to get really squiggy [sic] when you’re in a D/S context.’ Thus, even identifying abuse when it occurs is problematic, especially for this community.

As one of my female respondents who is deeply involved with the community maintained, many men might not see abuse occurring. As she argues, ‘just a gay male in the leather community is not going to see all of that [abuse]...and I don’t expect them to be aware of that or even really care about it. I do hope they police their own...Sometimes, I don’t know if they do or not.’ For her, the level of involvement and being a male both have something to do with one’s awareness of abuse. When I asked men about abuse, they mostly admitted it occurred and that, ‘we need to talk about it openly.’ Nevertheless, if there is one theme that united nearly all of those who spoke about abuse, it was the uneasiness of the term *victim*. Regardless of

gender, none of my respondents who had personal experience with abuse referred to themselves as victims.

As I previously argued, the rejection of the word *victim* links up to the critique of personal responsibility and geographies of care that reproduce the autonomous individual. Coupled with hyper-masculinity, *victim* becomes a very problematic word. In a community that reifies hyper-masculinity and by extension shuns being, what some may call, a ‘wuss’ (see Vanderbeck [2005] and Cupples, Guyatt, & Pearce [2007] for discussions concerning how the structure of masculinity disciplines signs of weakness), folks in the community tend to deny being a victim. This denial stems from the feminine coding of victim and victim’s association with being a ‘wuss.’ Put differently, the appropriation of hyper-masculinity within the community results in a narrowly delimiting understanding of abuse that circumscribes the means and mechanisms through which sufferers of abuse interpret, cope, and rhetorically cast their experience(s) with abuse. Embracing hyper-masculinity makes it difficult to admit that abuse happens. Folks, and especially men, are given the choice of either admitting to abuse—which is coded as feminine—or they deny abuse and at least outwardly maintain their sense of hyper-masculinity. As stoicism and anti-femininity are behavioral indicators of hyper-masculinity, embracing those means that abuse is hard to see, especially if it happens to you.

When members did admit to abuse, they still struggled to characterize it. When I asked one respondent if he had experience with abuse he replied, ‘yeah, I mean I guess so. I don’t know if I would call it that or just really aggressive behavior.’ This inability to characterize abuse denotes how embracing hyper-masculinity makes it difficult for folks to think about abuse. In other words, embracing hyper-masculinity all but erases the concept of abuse, or at a minimum it etches the specter of ‘wuss’ and femininity upon it. Moreover, this performance of

hyper-masculinity traps sufferers of abuse in an emotionally liminal space. It practically disallows them to characterize their experience as abuse; yet, many of my respondents know that something like abuse had taken place. The overlaying of femininity and weakness onto abuse reproduces a narrative that real men (to say nothing of women) are not abused. Paradoxically, some of the very people who are chary to use the word *victim*, at other times freely discuss the community as a place to seek refuge from abuse. Therefore, their understanding of the community as a space of refuge belies the claims that deny being a victim. In short, while many members do not use the word *victim*, they acknowledge that abuse occurs.

The paradox of *simulated rape* as an uncaring act

Some might consider the appropriation (or fetishization?) of rape as in opposition to the feminist movement. In this light, we must ask ourselves what political work does the appropriation of rape within this community conduct? In terms of power, *simulated rape* preys on performances of hyper-masculinity that enhance sexual encounters. As far as political work, however, using the term rape dilutes what actually occurs when someone is raped. This dilution is why I use the term *simulated rape* as opposed to rape. In short, the material and immaterial effects of *simulated rape* are nowhere near the effects of actual rape. At issue is whether we can claim *simulated rape* as an uncaring act?

Why do some in the leather community want to celebrate or imitate such a terrible act? When I asked this question of my respondents, most respondents remarked that it turned them on. Beyond turning them on sexually, a few respondents commented that the power dynamic or imbalance between the ‘victim’ and the ‘perpetrator’ was also very gratifying. The frankness and affinity with which some men discuss simulations of rape denotes a link between masculinity,

patriarchy, and power that flexes more openly in the community than in society at large (though there are obviously straight men and women who fantasize about rape). These men in the leather community openly talk about and emulate rape without actually committing it. I refer to the story where one of my respondents explained that a sex partner of his (who wanted to bottom) asked my respondent to rape him. For a week, the other guy left his door unlocked and my respondent told him that it would happen that week but refused to give a day. Finally, my respondent went over and ‘raped’ the other man. Both men enjoyed the encounter but my respondent said he ‘did not want to do it again.’ He claimed that if he were to repeat the act, it would not be ‘rape’ anymore because the act would take on too much of an air of familiarity and eagerness. He wanted to keep the act as aggressive, anonymous, and detached as possible. These desires certainly link up with the behavioral indicator of sexual aggression as part of hyper-masculinity. But even he admitted this act was not real rape. In this way, it is not the desire to commit such an act that renders it an uncaring act as much as it is the power imbalances and social hierarchies the act reproduces. Therefore, to engage in *simulated rape* is to perform or embody one’s hyper-masculinity.

But what of this desire? Does it bespeak some deeper cultural phenomenon more generally, or does it cue on something specific to the community? The answer is yes, to both. Many of my respondents use the community specifically as a space to perform their hyper-masculinity in ways they otherwise cannot—indeed that is part of the point of the community. The community, therefore, affords these men a space to articulate and assuage their pent up sexual desires and aggressions. The same above respondent who engaged in *simulated rape* also explained that the experience was a release for him. When I asked what he was releasing, he said, ‘I just have some pent-up frustration.’ As an expression of sexual desire these performances

also territorialize the space as a hyper-masculine one. It appears that for many of my respondents, body, attitude, and the embodiment of historical tropes of masculinity all culminate in the act of *simulated rape*. Through this act, they can aggressively display their dominance over another man or have another man thrust their dominance upon/in them in an ultimate act of surrender to the superiority of another man's masculinity. What better way to demonstrate one's hyper-masculinity than one man raping another man (or pretending to at least) and in so doing, he subjugates that man's masculinity and body.

Conclusion

This community turns the idea of what constitutes care on its head. As we have seen, larger structures in society, like patriarchy, pulse within and through the community to produce a space that is simultaneously welcoming and unwelcoming, caring and uncaring. As care takes myriad positive forms, its underbelly is the reproduction of heteronormative and homonormative gender roles. Indeed, in this community men congregate to express and explore what it means to be a man in unconventional acts. Through these often-sexualized explorations and performances, these men have re-conceptualized care in acts that simultaneously deny and recreate traditional norms. Thus, they play off historical tropes of masculinity as they relate to patriarchy—like power and domination—and then implant these tropes in contemporary understandings of hyper-masculinity. In turn, the performances of hyper-masculinity affect how they conduct tasks of care. And while the marginal place of the community may rest upon the appropriation of traditional gender roles, the way that these men care for and about each other, and the reasons why they seek care in the first place, often repudiate those same gender roles.

Chapter 6: Producing geographical knowledge about men and acknowledging bias

Researching men, but also women

In this chapter, I take up the issue of researching men and how that research translates into the production of academic knowledge especially as it relates to the themes of this dissertation. This is also an auto-ethnographic chapter in that I use my personal experience within the community and past relationships to critique what counts as acceptable academic knowledge production. In the current trend of emotional geographies, through the concept of abuse and my own experience with it, the reader can see how certain topics within geography are still on the fringe. In this chapter, I link my personal experience with the community, and academic knowledge production back to feelings of hyper-masculinity and inadequacy that I experienced. In this manner, the way I interacted with the community, at least in the beginning, was very much like someone who wanted to claim a type of hyper-masculinity that was rigidly drawn. Thus, this chapter allows me to explore my larger critique of the rigidity of hyper-masculinity within the community in a personal, self-reflexive manner.

Other scholars have written on the subject of academic knowledge production—especially how it relates to men and masculinity—and they inform my thinking on this topic (see Curtin & Linehan 2002; Vanderbeck 2005; Catungal 2010). Situating a discussion of knowledge production under the larger topic of emotion, I consider the emotions I experienced during my research as central to the knowledge I have produced in this dissertation. Indeed, as many scholars claim (Anderson & Smith 2001; Dixon, Chapman & Hill 2005; Catungal 2010), knowledge production is the articulation of emotion. Of interest in this section are the issues of:

women, intersectionality, and the choice of topic of my dissertation. I have focused on these three dimensions of my research project because they have played influential roles and have proven to be tough to tackle. Finally, even though I anticipated that these topics would be salient issues to address, I still underestimated their importance during the research process. Throughout this chapter, my modest hope is that through my commentary on what is acceptable (and thereby not acceptable) when it comes to emotional accounts within geography, I push the boundaries of what is allowable scholarship in discussions of one's positionality.

While my project is ostensibly about men, and especially gay men, I found that I could not write about men without understanding how women figured (or did not figure) into the community. To grasp a better understanding of women's placement within the community, this meant that I had to include women not only in my formal interviews but also in my many numerous, informal conversations that I did not record. These qualitative research practices pioneered by feminist researchers (England 1994; Rose 1997) merge with the call for a stronger placement of emotion within the research process (Hyndman 2001). This merging forms what is a simultaneous self-reflexive and emotional account of my research subjects and me during this research process.

This accounting came through in sometimes unexpected places. For example, when coding for the concept of 'care' within my interviews, one woman's experience defied categorization. She recounts her feelings of going into a bar called Diesel in Seattle: She states, 'well that's a different kind of bar with a different kind of space and I don't feel comfortable just walking in there. You know I don't think that's really appropriate...I'm not going to go in there without a really specific invitation.' Initially I coded this as an instance of uncaring because she at least felt hesitation for walking into that normally male space. Later, however, the same

respondent said that the experience turned out to be positive in large part because of the men who accompanied her into that bar. Nevertheless, because she attributes her positive experience to the men who were there, one wonders whether she would have had such an experience without the escort (so to speak) of a familiar man.

More broadly, foregrounding the experiences of women forced me to confront what feminist scholars have charged is the gendered bias of knowledge production (Anderson & Smith 2001; Longhurst & Johnston 2008) within my own research project. Often, when academics speak of this kind of bias, it has to do with the linkage between masculinity, objectivity, and rationalism. This linkage is why emotion has been largely excluded from geography and the social sciences—though that is changing and even researchers as far back as Bourdieu (2007) spoke of understanding one’s placement within a research context. As masculinity is a principle variable of my project, including women’s perspectives was crucial to help mitigate the inherent bias of my project because I identify as a man. Often when discussing their comfort or discomfort within the community, I noticed that most of the women I spoke with were eager to discuss gender. I recall one woman I had a short conversation with saying, ‘talking about women in the community is one of my favorite things to discuss because so many of the men get uneasy when I discuss this with them.’ She knew very well that the topic made many men uncomfortable and she even admitted to ratchetting up this discomfort because she enjoyed it. While talking to women gave me many insights, one that stands out is how most of the women I spoke to at otherwise male events were happy not to have many other women there. To be clear, most of the events I attended in Seattle were technically gender neutral but unofficially catered to men (though IML is more overtly geared toward men even though they have had a trans-person, F-to-M, win the event). Men were on the advertisements, men were at most of the booths, and

men were in most of the competitions. It stands to reason that most of the women probably knew that these spaces were geared toward men and probably sought that out. Nevertheless, I found it surprising how most of the women I spoke with were happy to be one of the few women in these otherwise male-dominated spaces.

Other feminist scholars (Behar 1993; Nagar 2002; Hart 2006) argue that ‘the field’ as a place of research does not stop or end. Instead, what knowledge we produce from the field is snapshot of an ongoing process. For me, because I had been involved in the leather community to some degree or another prior to conducting my fieldwork, the field has as much of an indeterminate beginning as it does an indeterminate end. Thus, this work is truly a snapshot; book-ended on the one side by a prior and complicated, personal history, and on the other by an ongoing involvement and infatuation with the community. How I or we attempt to translate or represent that snapshot is where power relations rear their ugly head. Thus, the retelling of stories and what stories we or others allow us to tell are circumscribed by the circumstances of our positionality. I knew from the outset that particularly strong (and at times, troubling) emotions structured my research and the relaying of my findings.

This relaying meant developing a rapport with the women and (to a lesser extent men) to whom I spoke, while still acknowledging that I could only sympathize with their position, but not empathize. One respondent who is transgender and does identify strongly with either female or male gender types, appreciated this acknowledgment. She stated, ‘I like that you say it must be difficult but also that you can’t know what it is like because you are a man.’ This quote does not suggest that men researching women should be constant apologists, but when one is in a position of privilege, owning up to that privilege can go a long way in fostering trust. Therefore, relaying what I found in the field, even if it is a snapshot of a much larger picture, was

contingent on exposing what power relations structured the field and my rapport with my research subjects.

Producing and publishing

If transnational feminism is about collaboration and what we can co-produce (Pratt & Yeoh 2003; Pinto 2013), then the leather community reflects this transnational feminist praxis through its embrace of networks of friendship and caring. As I have argued more extensively elsewhere, the kink sex play is, at times, incidental to the leather community. Instead, there exists a transnational sexual identity that members of specific local communities use to relate and quickly identify with members in other communities around the world. More than sexual gratification, however—though the sexual aspect of the community is vital to its survival—this shared identity allows members to collaborate on various projects (like leather archival projects) and come together in the major leather conferences (e.g., Folsom, IML) to produce a strong sense of community. Along with a strong sense of community, this coming together also produces more accepted versions of what it means to be masculine. This greater acceptance allowed me to move rather freely within the community and contact people for interviews more freely because I sometimes did not comport to some of the stricter ways that people performed leather within the community—i.e. wearing leather every day.

Throughout the PhD process I have written the chapters to my dissertation as standalone journal articles or book chapters. I consider this process of publication integral to my development as a scholar and the development of my dissertation. In publishing, the most common criticism I have received in reviews from other scholars is that I did not foreground race or whiteness enough. This critique emerged as either a call for a more intersectional analysis or simply to discuss whiteness more ardently. As Brown (2012) demonstrates, calls for more

intersectional analyses within queer geography are both appropriate but uneven. Certain identity categories, like race, are far more salient in intersectional analyses than other identity categories. While I consider my work to be at least mildly intersectional (it stands at the intersection of gender and sexuality) reviewers claimed that it was not intersectional enough—I needed to discuss whiteness. Did my relative absence of whiteness reveal my privileged relationship to it? Yes, this is likely true. Nevertheless, even when I explicitly stated that, ‘I have written about whiteness within the community elsewhere’ I still received the external critique that I needed to include a discussion of whiteness regardless of whether I felt it was germane.

Within geographic literature, scholars (Nash 2008; McWhorter 2009) have argued that race and other identities, like sexuality, are co-constituted and, therefore, to separate them runs the risk of essentializing one or the other. Yet in the reviews of both chapters I submitted to journals, no one asked for deeper discussions of class, age, disability, or other social identities. Indeed, there is a relative dearth of scholarship on the intersection of these identities with gender and sexuality when compared to race (Brown 2012). I suggest that this dearth of scholarship and foregrounding of race implies that geography has some normative blind spots. To borrow a phrase from Brown (2012), geography is an ‘anxious’ discipline and it seems the best way to assuage that anxiety is to call for greater discussions of race.

We may also ask, when is scholarship sufficiently intersectional? Is all that is needed is a discussion of race? Surely that is not sufficient and, at any rate, if calls for only a discussion of race and no other social categories are heard, then most discussions of race will likely end up perfunctory. Moreover, how do we choose which identities to highlight and which to de-emphasize? While no one has perfect answers to these questions, many feminists are keen to point out how all of us are situated and have partial perspectives, especially when it comes to

social identities (Peake 2009). Perhaps the best we can do is continue to reveal our partial perspectives through self-reflection and the privileges and identities that stem from our positionality. In this manner, we may uncover, more clearly, the social identities we hold most dear, open ourselves up to candid and welcome criticism be it about race or another social category, and ultimately lead to better self-reflection.

In keeping with the theme of self-reflection, one important concept I have grappled with in conducting this research and indeed, through the entire PhD process, is the notion that one must be willing not only to acknowledge one's privilege, but also give up some of it. This challenge was put forth to me by Kim England several years back in a conversation we had during my dissertation proposal defense when she asked, 'what privilege do you have and what privilege are you willing to give up?' I am a white male and the freedoms afforded my group have long been documented. Fortunately, some of these privileges, not nearly enough however, are being castigated. My racial and gender privilege are not the only ones I carry with me. Frankly, these privileges were relatively easy to recognize. Instead, as the research process unfolded, what hit me squarely in my academic head was the idea of arrogance. I suspect that like I have, other academics have had to recognize and come to terms with the privilege of arrogance. This arrogance stems from the misguided notion that somehow academics are not as biased as other folks. This kind of privilege certainly held true for my respondents and for me. Many of them discussed the luxury of being white men and how, aside from their sexuality, they benefitted from their perceived racial and gender identity. Coming to terms with my own biases and finding ways to mitigate their effect in the field was a challenge.

Mitigating or concealing one's bias is sometimes impossible as Longhurst, Ho, and Johnston (2008) demonstrate when they discuss the impossibility of concealing bodily disgust

for certain food combinations. I, of course, could not conceal my racial identity. Instead, through this research process, I have learned that you can give up some privileges through certain measures like voting or simple acknowledgement. Others, however, are firmly rooted in hierarchical structures like racial preferences and other folks may deeply embody biases or privileges relating to those preferences. Thus, my point when discussing privileges and the notion of giving them up, is that there are certain privileges that are easy to shed, as a snake sheds worn-out skin, and others that are thrust upon you—like race—which have an annoying recalcitrance. Endeavoring to disabuse one's self of the privileges that can be shed, and then lay bare those more recalcitrant privileges and biases to criticism by others as well as self-criticism should be a hallmark of research.

Other scholars have noted how bodies can reveal certain emotions or gain access (acquire privilege) within the research process (Nast & Pile 1998; Longhurst 2000; Crang 2003). In my case, I was aware that my body and how I dressed would make me more amenable to interviewees if I wore a piece of leather. I also knew that being a white man would afford me trust and ease of access to most of my respondents. When I went for an interview, I always wore a visible piece of leather, usually a wristband, even though I typically did not wear something leather every day. I was also very conscious of smiling and maintaining eye contact and even though race/whiteness was not omnipresent in my mind, as other scholars have maintained (Gates 1988; Morrison 1993), it was still there, stalking in the shadows. I am also aware that my obsession with the gym allows me to fit (at least to a significant degree) the normative, hegemonic ideal of the masculine aesthetic. My embodiment of this aesthetic no doubt afforded me access and comfort to many of my respondents.

Discussing emotions during the research process can be a risky venture. Some scholars have charged that shedding light on those things personal and emotional can distract us from so-called real-world political experiences (Hamnet 2001; Martin 2001). And while the danger of spiraling into solipsism is certainly real, feminists have gone to great strides to insert the personal, the emotional, and the self as viable points of reference and units of analysis for research (Steedman 1987; Julien & Mulvey 1995; Jones 2002; Mulvey 2003; Writers & Nagar 2006; Krauss 2006). Indeed, yesterday's solipsism may be commonplace today. Other geographers have argued that we need better accounts of how the world is 'mediated through feeling' (Thien 2005, p. 451). Thus, in this section I focus on the primary emotions that structured both my respondents' interactions with the community, my interactions with the community and my respondents, and to push the boundaries of what counts as acceptable scholarship when it comes to self-reflexivity. And in pushing these boundaries, I found that exploring my own notions of hyper-masculinity as they related to my experience with an abusive relationship was a fruitful, but sometimes painful, way to go about pushing these boundaries.

It might seem ironic to foreground emotion when writing about men. After all, emotion has historically been relegated to the domain of women (Rose 1993; McLaughlin 2003). Yet there are geographers who take up the issue of emotion in researching men (Vanderbeck 2005; Catungal 2010) and how researching men made them feel—especially how they may have felt out of place. My main argument here is that we need to include a larger spectrum of what counts as viable emotions and this accounting for emotion should be foregrounded in academic, especially qualitative, research. This accounting for emotion, however, will mean that academics must speak candidly about which emotions informed their work, not just that emotions *writ large* informed their work. If we are to take emotional labor seriously, as Bellas (1999) argues, then we

need to divorce ourselves from the still prevalent and masculinist notion that science must be objective. And even after many years of ardent, feminist scholarship, the idea that we account for what emotions inform the knowledge we produce is not mainstream within large swaths of academia. What follows is a frank, auto-ethnographic account of the emotions I experienced while researching folks, particularly the men, in my fieldwork.

Initially, I had chosen to investigate the leather community for several reasons: I was involved in a relationship with someone who was active (or so they claimed) in the leather community, I wanted to be more active in the community, and I was attracted to their politics and the community's purposeful attempt to dismantle hetero and homonormativity. This project was to be a geography of desire (Bell et al. 1994; Bell & Valentine 1995; Binnie & Valentine 1999) as much as it was a somewhat political project to keep the thrust of adding a queer sensibility to geography (Brown & Knopp 2003). And while I never veered from those intellectual aims, my personal, romantic relationship began to unravel and this led me to new motives for my research.

To be blunt, I found myself in a physically and emotionally abusive relationship. I mention this, not to illicit sympathy. Instead, it is the truth of the circumstances surrounding the development of my project so I need to expose it. The emotions I experienced concerning this relationship played a major role in the development of my project and even led me to ask many of my respondents about abuse because I knew, from personal experience, that it was an important topic for the community. Like many of my respondents who spoke of abuse, my choice to discuss this topic is not a move to valorize myself through oppression, what Hancock (2007) calls the 'oppression Olympics.' Like many of my respondents who underwent abuse, I do not want anyone to feel sorry for me. Instead, the goal here is to take the call for inserting

emotion(s) into the research process seriously. If I subscribe to this call, then I must reveal the visceral emotions that structured this project—and those emotions, in part, concern abuse. To discuss the emotions that informed this project and my personal ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams 1977), so to speak, without discussing those emotions surrounding abuse would be disingenuous.

I situate this discussion of abuse within larger discussions of binaries, like emotion versus intellect. In short, one’s intellect is simply another form of emotion in my opinion. When discussing binaries, such as emotion/intellect, nature/culture, objectivity/partiality, one tendency scholars have admonished is the tendency for one pole to subsume the other (Haraway 1989; Bordo 1993; Rose 1993; Braun 2007). I am wary of this tendency and I try to side-step it here by not making a clear distinction between emotion and intellect. To discuss emotions/emotional labor within the research process is simultaneously to discuss intellectual labor. Indeed, the false distinction between rationalism (which sometimes masquerades as intellect) and emotion is an important tendency feminists have inveighed. In addition, as Bellas (1999) argues, researchers can become very involved in their subjects’ lives, if even only briefly. Therefore, in some ways, not to account and lay bare the shared emotional responses my respondents and I had surrounding abuse would be a silent transgression against feminist research methods and would also reify the divide between intellect and emotion.

Abuse (and I understand I am using this word here rather generally to encompass all forms of domestic violence) is so laden with visceral emotions that, more than many other topics, it challenges our predispositions about what is acceptable academic work. As Bordo (1993) reminds us, the body has characteristically and philosophically been aligned with femininity while the mind has been aligned with masculinity. In this case, the body, Bordo goes on to suggest, is linked also with emotions as the body is the harbinger of emotions. Thus, when we

discuss such powerful emotions as those surrounding abuse, we prick at deep-seated biases about women and men and these biases are translated into the gatekeepers of professionalism within academic knowledge production. The result is that personal, deep-seated emotions have mostly been outlawed, while other emotions or those issues we may consider more intellectual have been foregrounded. Moreover, queer geography represents a great space for the exposition of these deep-seated emotions as it has been concerned with many other uneasy topics (see Nash and Bain [2007] who discuss their emotions surrounding their foray into a Toronto women's bathhouse).

While writing about this literally causes me bodily discomfort, I take this discomfort as a positive sign of growth and as a sign that I am plucking feelings that lurk deep within the cavern of my emotions and therefore challenge accepted conventions concerning geographic scholarship. As I have written elsewhere, many in the leather community seek refuge from abusive relationships through the various support networks in the community. While I did not use the community for this purpose, I did find solace in my interviews with others who experienced abusive relationships. Of course, within geography there are accounts of abuse (Cribb 1999; Pain 2014; Gray 2016) but nearly all of what geographers have written concerning abuse and domestic violence deals with men abusing women—with Holmes (2009) being a notable exception who discusses domestic violence in lesbian relationships. When it comes to emotions surrounding abuse in the research process, I could find nothing that directly spoke to this topic within geographic literature nor could I find much on male-to-male domestic violence.

This absence and silence speaks to what feminists have noted is a divide between public and private but I suspect it also speaks to the uneasiness that many men feel concerning the topic of abuse between men. To discuss something so intensely personal and anti-masculinist,

(Lawson 1995) may feel like it is too feminine, too emotional, and has no place in the public arena of academic geography. Like other binaries, what counts as personal versus public, or feminine versus masculine, is fuzzy distinction when we start to parse out the qualities we attach to those categories. Alternatively, I align this discussion with other geographers who seek to queer the discipline (Bell 2007). In this sense, this discussion is ‘fucking geography, again’ all over again, except this time the topic is squarely hammered on male-to-male abuse and less about sex and the sexed body.

The topic of researchers experiencing abuse in a male-to-male context and then writing about it appears to be off limits, if for no other reason than such discussions have rarely, if ever, occurred. Is such a topic too ‘touchy, feely,’ as Crang (2003) quips? Up until now, the answer appears to be, yes. In addition, addressing this topic calls into question whether geography has any sacred cows? In other words, should certain topics stay hidden in the penumbra of the discipline? In short, no. If human geography seeks to be a radical discipline (and not just radical in a Marxist sense) then nothing should be left off the map, so to speak. Of course, critics might charge that such an opening of the proverbial self-reflexive flood gates could lead to whimsy accounts of personal reflection, or worse still, uncomfortable accounts of human geographers undergoing human experiences, like abuse or domestic violence. If, however, we are to keep certain topics off the map and dislocated, then in the words of Amin and Thrift (2005), ‘What’s Left?’ for geography?

In my case, what was left were the myriad emotions surrounding abuse/domestic violence that structured and informed much of my dissertation project. Not able to change my topic, I had to find a way to work with the difficulty of seeing people that knew both my ex-partner and me. I also knew my ex surely would have told his side of the story. These circumstances led me to a

general malaise. Like so many of my respondents who discussed abuse/DV, I also felt emasculated and embarrassed. Some of these feelings have a long, personal history for me. As an adolescent, I remember a friend of mine saying, ‘real men don’t get abused.’ As ridiculous as that statement is, it illuminates the messiness surrounding abuse; and this messiness for many men (and for me) is bound up in our sense of masculinity. Damaged pride, ego, embarrassment, shame—all those emotions swirled like colors of a dizzying kaleidoscope when I considered what had happened to me. And even though I very much oppose instances of abuse, I have read too much Butler and post-structuralist theory to realize that we are always bound up in that which we oppose.

Like I have, some of my respondents acknowledged fuzziness when it comes to what constitutes abuse. Some even claimed that it was harder to tell what constituted abuse when one is in a BDSM relationship. While defining abuse and domestic violence in BDSM relationships may be more difficult, there is still a line that one crosses that constitutes abuse. Namely this transgression occurs when unwelcome, unsolicited, and non-consensual emotional, mental, or physical advances occur. The point here, however, is not the nuanced gradations of abuse or comparing one’s situation to another—something with which I continue to struggle—but that the emotions I experienced surrounding this topic were the same as my respondents’ and these emotions allowed me to bond and commiserate with my research subjects. Ironically, if I had not undergone abuse, I might not have written so much about it or even picked up on the saliency and importance of it within the community.

Experiencing these shared emotions made me a better researcher and improved my methods in the field. One primary improvement was through my ability to relate to others. For better or worse, having experienced abuse allowed me to empathize and connect with my

respondents more quickly. Put differently, we had a shared embodied experience. Such a connection afforded me more credibility. This type of connection with some of my respondents allowed me to bring these shared, embodied emotions to the surface. As Longhurst and Johnston (2008) aver, one aspect of research that remains understudied and largely unaccounted for is how feelings and emotions shape our bodies as agents of research. Moreover, these feeling bodies negotiate the world and spaces of research such that to neglect them is to exclude key relations through which places become meaningful. There were several, poignant times when a research subject and I bonded over emotions surrounding abuse. In this manner, the spaces of conversation with my respondents took on a more intimate atmosphere that eventually led to my previous discussions of abuse within the community. This shared history became a way that both researcher and subject authenticated not only the space(s) we inhabited, but also each other. One respondent admitted that they, ‘might not have shared as much about their abuse if you had not also had something similar happen to you.’

Discussing my emotions and those of my respondents concerning abuse is also a form of self-care. Self-care in the research process is an important cathartic step as Widowfield (2000) is keen to point out. Sorting through my emotional responses concerning abuse helped me in two main ways: first, it allowed me to have a deeper insight into the emotional responses of the survivors of abuse within my project, and secondly, it allowed me to work through some unresolved negativity concerning my personal experience. Having deeper insight into my respondents’ emotions on this topic helped me understand the cycle of abuse and dismantle the misguided and simplistic notion of why someone ‘chooses’ to stay with an abuser. I especially identified with other survivors who echoed my sentiment of wanting to help their partner. In other words, while I and some of my respondents realized even in the moment that we were being abused, the desire

to help our partner override the impetus to leave. Perhaps the most important cathartic act I experienced during my fieldwork was the release of disgust or some emotion bordering on hate for my ex-partner. As cliché as it might sound, it does take quite a bit of energy to actively hate, or extremely dislike, someone. Through my discussions concerning abuse, my respondents helped me let go of this disgust and frame it in a more constructive light. Interestingly, though I did not intend to use my fieldwork or the leather community as a place of refuge or a therapeutic landscape (Gessler 1992; Moon, Kearns, and Joseph 2006), through my conversations with my respondents, that is exactly what the field became for me.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

As I have tried to demonstrate throughout this dissertation, through their efforts to use their bodies, perform their brand of masculinity, and ultimately care for one another, the men in Seattle's leather community are brave men. Whether all the men in the community are self-conscious about their political goals and those of the community or if they are more hedonistically inclined, their efforts nevertheless transgress heteronormative and homonormative politics. At the same time, those transgressive, determined efforts also tend to reproduce the very structures they seek to undermine. In this way, these men are brave, but also bound. I remember seeing a man at Folsom bound to a Saint Andrew's cross (see Figure 21) with rope and leather restraints. This literal image stands as a useful synecdoche for the community; for, though he was bound, he was also seeking and experiencing pleasure and it was the very binding that elicited him the pleasure he sought. The cross in this instance (and perhaps the cross we bear) is the community.



Figure 21 is a picture of a St. Andrew's Cross. Recall that the man being flogged at Folsom was tied up to one of these.

The reader will recall that I began this work with a discussion of the 'crisis in masculinity' (Jackson 1991; Jhally et al. 1999; Hopkins 2009; Connell 2005; Edwards 2006; Ta 2006; Edwards and Jones 2009; Hopkins & Noble 2009; Way 2011; Kimmel 2012). The men who labor at being hyper-masculine in this community, certainly appear appropriately cast within this context. For as the chapter on care demonstrates, I read their misogyny as an anxiety over the terrain of masculinity and attempt to gain control over that terrain—a control that their imaginings of the past claim to have existed more concretely. Of course, this is only one example. We can also read the obsession some members have with crafting their bodies in muscular ways as folding into the crisis. After all, muscularity lies at the heart of what many members believe makes a man. And as other scholars have noted, traditional concepts of masculinity during this crisis in masculinity have gained more traction (Kimmel 2012) as places where men look to in order to gain a firmer sense of their rascality. While I cannot say that the leather community is a result of the crisis, indeed it has existed since before the crisis, we can say that it is a space that rests upon tradition and it stands to reason, therefore, that it too is an enticing place for men to go who seek traditional understandings of masculinity.

Moving on from this crisis, in Chapter 3 I discussed how men territorialize their bodies and create the spaces of the leather community. As I argued, performances of hyper-masculinity are a method the community uses to territorialize space. Geographers have discussed the territorialization of space (Hansen & Stepputat 2005; Atherton 2009; Valdivia 2009). And I extended these discussions to show that through performances of their bodies, their sense of history, and consumerism, that these men territorialized space. These acts of territorialization

create a place and subculture that is simultaneously welcoming and exclusionary. Through this analysis, I extended understandings of hyper-masculinity within geography in two ways. First, the concept is under-theorized and especially when we consider how performances of hyper-masculinity relate to the territorialization of space. Second, how their rather essentialized understandings of hyper-masculinity, both in biological and historical ways, informed these territorial performances.

In chapter 4, I offered a more nuanced, place contingent, critical way to think about masculinity by critiquing the somewhat uncritical way geographers' have critiqued masculinity. I used the concept of hyper-masculinity to highlight a conceptual problem between essentialist and de-essentialized notions of gender. Constructionist notions of masculinity (Bell et al. 1994; Berg & Longhurst 2003; Connell 2005; Vanderbeck 2005; Hopkins & Noble 2009; Bryant & Garnham 2015) do not escape the essentialist problem; however, by critiquing and offering a placed conceptualization of hyper-masculinity based on Seattle's gay leather community, I pushed the boundaries of masculinity and gender to arrive at a more nuanced, embodied, place-based and contingent understanding of hyper-masculinity thereby side-stepping the debate concerning essentialist/constructionist conceptualizations of masculinity. This critique was also necessary to align my conceptual discussion with how the members in the community discussed masculinity because, more often than not, they used essentialized terms; whereas geographers do not.

In Chapter 5, I chronicled instances of care and (un)care within the community, I argued that the community both reproduces and repudiates heteronormative and homonormative gender roles through instances of care and (un)care. I linked this double movement of reproduction and subversion to a neoliberal subject formation that places responsibility at the scale of the

individual. This placing of responsibility is reflected in the ways the community conducts care. In turn, care and (un)care link up to hyper-masculinity through the ways that men understand their hyper-masculinity. For example, stoicism, or the idea that real men do not get abused, affects how men in the community talk about care—or even understand when instances of (un)care have occurred. Thus, performances of (un)care can sometimes go unnoticed because hyper-masculinity can sometimes make men either unable or unwilling to recognize them. This tendency has the effect of reinforcing a hyper-masculinity that relies on men showing little emotion or concern for acts of violence, like domestic violence, that have typically been reserved in discussions of women and violence (Pain, 2014). Nevertheless, through open discussions of violence, men in the community are also dismantling this rigid understanding of violence where violence seems only to occur in the direction of men to women.

In Chapter 6 I examined the idea of researching men and how that research translates into the production of academic knowledge especially as it relates to the themes of this dissertation. This chapter was the most personal as I used an auto-ethnographic account of abuse to frame my understanding of abuse within the community, but also my critique that certain topics like abuse are still out of bounds for the discipline of geography. This is ironic considering that silence surrounding the topic of abuse within geographic knowledge production (publications and even in informal conversations) is a reproduction of the uncaring aspects of hyper-masculinity. My experience with abuse allowed me to see this irony and the consequences of absurd within the community more clearly.

Other scholars have written on this subject of researching men and they informed my thinking on this topic (see Curtin & Linehan 2002; Vanderbeck 2005; Catungal 2010). Nevertheless, as no one that I can find within geography has written on the topic of abuse

occurring between men, I had to rely on other literatures within geography, like the literature on emotion. Indeed, geographies of emotion (Anderson & Smith 2001; Dixson, Chapman & Hill 2005; Catungal 2010), formed the backbone of this chapter. Part of my goal was to expand what counts as emotional geography to include discussions of abuse between men. Whether I was successful will largely depend, at least to me, on whether we start witnessing scholarship on the concept of abuse between men.

Practical, policy, and social contributions

Finally, my project will help give more visibility to, and a better understanding of, the leather community. It will also shed light on the community's tendencies for guarding and policing itself and a better understanding of how subcultures coalesce, morph, and evolve. My project also invites members of the community to be reflective about their social practices and asks them to consider why and where being hyper-masculine is appropriate. Of course, understanding when and where to be hyper-masculine will always depend on that person's definition of it. Likewise, some members believe that part of their masculinity will require them to incur into spaces where their type of masculinity is not welcome. Indeed, this type of incursion is a defining characteristic for some in the community of hyper-masculinity. In this way, where and when it is appropriate to be hyper-masculine is a difficult question to answer—but it usually depends on the space these men inhabit.

I also hope that in frankly discussing the attributes and qualities of the community that I can demystify some negative perceptions of the community. Overall, I found the community to be a welcoming and accepting space. Indeed, one minor theme of my research was that people found acceptance and camaraderie in this community when they could not find it elsewhere. I

will bring the concept of leather and the leather community more visibility within the discipline of geography and demonstrate that, while many associate purely sexual ideas with men in leather, there are also other benefits for being part of the leather community. For example, these men are caring and accepting of a wide variety of sexual fetishes.

In a more theoretical sense, I hope I have challenged how geographers conceptualize masculinity. This is an especially important topic when we consider it in the context of an increasingly globalized, yet fragmented, world. What will happen to conceptualizations of masculinity and our understanding of it as new and emerging, yet scattered masculinities, mingle in the age of these ‘world cities’? What will happen to men as they witness the erosion of their dominant status? As my research has shown, places will become sites for men to claim or reclaim their masculinity. Thus, we need a more place-based understanding of hyper-masculinity.

In a US context, we witness one outcome of this erosion in Trump’s campaign slogan of, ‘Make America Great Again!’ This slogan that resonates with many suburban, white men, implies that earlier times, when men were dominant and women were subordinate, were greater times. Moreover, the ideas of ‘Making America Great Again’ and the crisis in masculinity are two sides of the same coin. Indeed, the crisis is an expression of the uneasiness that many men feel and Trump’s slogan is an expression of that disavows that uneasiness through a return to earlier times. And while the crisis may be largely a straight crisis, it still intersects within the gay male community and, as I have argued, within the leather community. Indeed, many men in the leather community have an ‘unhappy marriage’ with women in general that mirrors the tension that Hartman (1979) outlines between Marxists and feminists. Therefore, when I discuss the men

in this community and their sense of masculinity, we must also understand that this discussion is bound up with women and notions of femininity.

Through this research, I have also come to understand that while many men in the leather community cling to a specific brand of masculinity, or hyper-masculinity, this clinging leads to a tyranny of masculinity. By *tyranny of masculinity* I mean that masculinity for many of these men prevents them from expressing certain emotions (for example, those surrounding abuse), and it also forces us to draw on historical notions of masculinity when men were men, women were women, and America was great. This type of understanding of masculinity presents itself in the community through positivist phrases like, 'I'll make a man out of you yet' and notions that a real man is a hulking, muscular, stoic beast. In these poststructuralist times, social theorists, like Butler, help us to remember that there is no original, and thus there is no such thing as a 'real man.' Herein lies the paradox, however. Many men, in different communities, and in the leather community especially, do not understand masculinity in this way. For many men and communities, like the leather community, masculinity relies very heavily on historical notions of what it means to be a man— notions that are specific to certain spaces or communities. As I and other geographers have argued (Mitchell 1996), these historical notions are often faulty. Instead, we conjure up ideas and icons in the present and rhetorically and discursively place them in the past. Through this placement, we conduct a certain political and cultural work that justifies present notions of masculinity by placing those notions in the past. It is a form of recycling, a kind of ceaseless dialectic; a process where Eagleton (1975) says, 'history chases its own tail.'

There are drawbacks or limitations to this research. It would have been ideal if I could have spent as much time in a leather community in another city as I did in the one in Seattle. This would have given me more comparison and more insight into how Seattle's community is

different, but also how it is like other communities around the nation. I could make some of the inferences based on my fieldwork, but some are more epiphenomenal rather than substantive.

Also, the time spent in Seattle's community was front loaded. By that I mean I was far more active in the community several years ago than I am today. Initially, I wanted to enter contests and I attended events and contest more frequently. As I become more involved, however, I found that my involvement felt more like work. In fact, a sense of work became almost overwhelming and I had to withdraw some from the community. Perhaps this feeling came from a general feeling that to be hyper-masculine in this community takes a lot of work—or at least it did for me. Remembering to wear something leather, say the right thing, or behave in the correct way started to feel very heavy. And, with the experience of my ex, the idea of being as involved as I once was, appeared untenable. No doubt, other members of the community feel differently than I do and for them, the feeling that they have to work is not nearly as strong as it is with me. I still identify with leather and I have friends whom are very active in the community. Suffice it to say that my knowledge these days is more as an outsider and that if I were to conduct the fieldwork for this dissertation now, I would likely speak many of the same people, but also different ones.

Upon reflection, what is most striking for me concerning the community is the power it gains through its network. In this globalized world, the leather community has an advantage. Through its network, friendships and relationships can easily be maintained. Halberstam (2005) reminds us that globalization enables while it also opposes and, for those in fortunate positions (like many men in the leather community), we can take advantage of these enabling tendencies of globalization. In fact, it was these intensified and sped up connections (what Harvey [2007] calls the annihilation of space through time) that many of the members cited as keeping the

community strong and vibrant. Through these enabling forces, members reinforce the shared sense of community, or what I have previously described as a leather mentality and sensibility.

Yet as I reflect on this shared sensibility within the community, I wonder what truly binds the members of the community together? That shared sensibility is certainly part of, if not nearly entirely, what unites these men. But what underwrites this shared sensibility? Perhaps as some in the community claim, it is the commonality of desire for kink sex play, to belong to a surrogate family, or to feel like a ‘real man’ that binds the community together. And in a relativistic way, I cannot say that wanting to feel like a real man, or holding onto a sense of masculinity borne out of the past is all bad. But maybe there is something else at play here. Perhaps what unites these men is a shared experience of oppression and hardship rather than a commonality of desire; a shared experience of oppression that nearly all gay men undergo at some point in their lives. Oppression is the tie that binds.

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