Leatherdyke Boys and Their Daddies
HOW TO HAVE SEX WITHOUT WOMEN OR MEN

There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all.
—Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*

Contemporary queer theory sees gender as a regulatory construct, a site of shifting power relations. Although queer theorists have made many claims about the power of queerly gendered bodies and performativities to disrupt enforced normative sex/gender systems, theory lags far behind community discourses here. In sexual-minority communities, such as queer leather communities, there are rich and subtly nuanced discourses of gendered pleasure, practice, desire, and subjectivity. These community discourses sometimes reflect rich and subtly nuanced embodiments of gender that resist and exceed any simple categorization into *female, male, woman, man*, and thus into *homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual*.1 Further, queer theory has tended to neglect “the implications of an enforced sex/gender system for people who live outside it,” as Ki Namaste has argued with regard to queer theory’s erasure of transgendered subjectivity.2 When transgendered subjects participate in minority communities organized around radical sexual practice, new and theoretically interesting configurations of sex, gender, and sexuality arise. In this paper, I will theorize the genderings of U.S. leatherdyke boys and their leatherdyke daddies. I am especially concerned to explore how leatherdyke genderplay functions as a means for gender interrogation, solidification, resistance, destabilization, and reconfiguration. From this investigation, I will draw some tentative conclusions about multiple gender statuses already available in the United States.

First, I need to address briefly my qualifications to write on this topic and my subject position in relation to leatherdyke communities and practices. My birth certificate bears witness that when I was born, I was diagnosed “female” and given a heavily gendered feminine name. I was raised girl-to-woman, with a fairly unambiguous female body until I began injections of exogenous testosterone on 19 May 1995. For most of my adult life, I lived as a bisexual woman whose primary sexual relationships were with heterosexual men. In 1991 I “came out” as a lesbian, and two years

---


later I began exploring SM and participating in leatherdyke friendship circles and community structures, primarily in Los Angeles. In 1995 I began transitioning female-to-male (ftm), leatherdyke-to-leatherfag. I retain strong ties with a number of Los Angeles leatherdykes and continue to participate in some leatherdyke community public events, such as serving as a VIP boy for the 1997 Ms. Fallen Angels Contest, although I do not attend women-only play parties even when invited. Since I have not undertaken research even approximating careful ethnography, any generalizations must be tentative. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that not only are uses of leatherdyke genderplay as ftm transitioning technologies different for different ftms, but that many ftms have never participated in leatherdyke or other lesbian practices or communities at all.

From an external-to-leatherdyke-culture point of view, and as a first approximation that I will complicate later, “leatherdyke boys” are adult lesbian (dyke) females who embody a specific range of masculinities intelligible within queer leather (SM) communities; their “daddies” may be butch leatherdykes or, less frequently, gay leathermen. This delineation is, of course, vague insofar as it replicates the haziness of the boundaries between the categories female, lesbian, dyke, queer, leather, and butch. In this paper, I restrict my focus to leatherdyke boys and their leatherdyke daddies, leaving aside investigations of how gender works in interactions between leatherdyke boys and their gay leathermen daddies.

Leatherdyke boys perform masculinity in a wide range of ways. Playing as a boy does not necessitate age-play; status as a boy may simply indicate a masculine bottom status—submissive or masochistic or both—different from that of a slave. However, in my experience age-play is more common in leatherdyke boy-daddy settings than it is in gay male ones. When boy-daddy age-play occurs, play ages may bear no relation to the legal ages of the players; daddy may be younger than her boy, according to their birth certificates. Leatherdyke boys may have specific play ages, or may locate themselves vaguely as young children or as teenagers; some leatherdyke boys are little boys, some are big boys. Leatherdyke boys may relate to their daddies in loving, respectful, and attentive manners, or they may be bratty, rebellious, withdrawn, or distant. They may signal their status as boys with age- and gender-specific clothing—such as a Boy Scout shirt, schoolboys’ short pants, a Catholic schoolboy uniform, school sports uniforms, or youthful hip hop styles that are at odds with more traditional leather-community styles—or clothing may give no clues as to their status as boys. Clothing is very likely, however, to indicate their statuses as SM bottoms and as butches. Clothing may also vaguely indicate levels of SM experience and, in more precise ways, interest in particular sexual activities. In short, the range of masculinities open for leatherdyke boys’ performativities is at least as wide as that open to young males,
though it is inflected both through lesbian community butch styles and through leather-community means of signaling bottom status and interest in specific sexual activities.

Since leatherdyke boys’ masculine performativities often occur in contexts separate from interactions with workmates, family (as defined by law), neighbors, and other friends and acquaintances outside of SM contexts, they are less bounded by cultural constructions of masculinity, which are inflected by such vectors of power as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, or occupation, than the performativities of young males. For example, an upper-middle-class professional woman can become a sixteen-year-old headbanger rockerdude with a change of clothing and attitude.

Gayle Rubin has argued that “there are more ways to be butch” than “there are ways for men to be masculine,” since “when women appropriate masculine styles the element of travesty produces new significance and meaning.” Rubin’s point extends even further when applied to leatherdyke masculinities as enacted in leatherdyke play spaces: when leatherdyke boys’ masculine performativities occur in conjunction with fairly unambiguous female embodiments in settings, such as play parties, where heavily gender-coded bodily zones are visible, their performativities are less bounded by cultural regulations of masculinity than young males’ are.

This is not to suggest that leatherdyke boys’ masculine performativities are unregulated in leatherdyke contexts. Gender performativity, just as any other form of performativity, must occur within social constraints to be intelligible; it must be intelligible if it is to be efficacious; and if it is not efficacious it cannot succeed as performative. Further, wider lesbian community anxieties about masculinity, manhood, and maleness circulate throughout leatherdyke communities. These anxieties become especially acute in determining the boundaries of the category woman for admittance to women-only sexual spaces, due to a felt need to protect women’s sexual safety in sexual spaces. Transsexuals—male-to-female (mtf) and, more recently, female-to-male—have become the major threat to the apparent purity of this boundary. Indeed, other than disputes about whether or not male-to-female transsexuals—with or without surgical alterations of their genitals—may attend the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, the most anxiety-fraught and vociferous struggles around political boundaries of the category woman in lesbian communities have been disputes about how to define woman for purposes of admittance to leatherdyke play parties. Although most organizations that host such parties are geographically local, these disputes have been international, because people travel to attend parties out of their geographical regions and because of community discussions in publications such as the now-defunct leatherdyke magazine Venus Infer and on-line. Such disputes may reflect different local play-
party traditions that shape policy. For example, as the predominantly separatist Seattle leatherdyke community involved in organizing Powersurge attempted to create an event that would draw national attendance and yet enforce their local separatist traditions and policies, they ran into friction with leatherdykes from other regions, such as San Francisco, with deliberately nonseparatist traditions and policies.\textsuperscript{6}

In these disputes, anxieties centered around both male embodiment and masculine behaviors. Usually, however, when unclothed embodiment is unambiguously female, a much wider range of masculine behaviors are tolerated than when embodiment is partially male. As Gayle Rubin has observed, “Obnoxious behavior that would be tolerated in a butch will often be considered intolerable in an FTM.”\textsuperscript{7} While a butch with a fairly unambiguous female body may be called up short for behaving badly, her behavior will not likely be attributed to her sex/gender status, embodiment, self-identifications, or history. In contrast, if an mtf or an ftm engages in the same behaviors, these behaviors are more likely to be labeled “male” and to be attributed to sex/gender history, identification, or embodiment. Further, the person engaging in such behaviors may be banned from attending future play parties and exiled from leatherdyke communities and friendship circles, and causal attributions of objectionable behaviors to sex/gender may be cited as justificatory grounds for changing definitional policies to exclude other mtfs or ftms in the future.

Play party invitations, instruction in SM techniques, inclusion in community organizations and friendship circles, and access to sex/play partners are powerful means for leatherdyke community regulation of leatherdyke conduct, perhaps more so than are their analogs within broader lesbian communities. Despite these regulatory mechanisms, masculine gender performativities, in conjunction with female embodiment, are given a wider range of expression within leatherdyke contexts than in many other lesbian or dyke settings.

Leatherdyke boy-daddy play sometimes functions as a means of gender exploration, solidification, resistance, destabilization, and reconfiguration. This can be illustrated by examining some of the ways in which boy or daddy play within leatherdyke contexts can facilitate female-to-male transitioning paths. In this section, I will rely on my own personal experiences as a leatherdyke boy and the experiences of Spencer Bergstedt as a leatherdyke daddy prior to his transition.

There are at least three ways in which leatherdyke boy or daddy play can function to consolidate a leatherdyke boy’s or daddy’s self-identification as male or as a man. One, which is not exemplified by either Bergstedt or myself, is through a conception of submission, especially to pain, as the most masculine SM position, especially when the person to whom one submits is also masculine. A second is that which Bergstedt described to
me in an interview on 9 August 1995: leatherdyke daddy play enabled him
to explore his masculine dominance more thoroughly than he could in
other areas of his life. A third is through exploration of masculine boy-
hoods or periods of adolescence that were missing from our lives as we
developed pubescent female bodies—bodies that were supposed to end
our lives as tomboys and signal the beginnings of womanhood. I will illus-
trate this by recounting some of my own personal experiences.

While still identifying as a dyke, Bergstedt served as International
Ms. Leather 1994. He currently sits on the executive board of the
National Leather Association, holding the same position he did prior to
transition. An attorney practicing in Seattle, Bergstedt has served on the
boards of numerous other community organizations, including the Seattle
City Commission on Lesbians and Gays. Active in transgender commu-
nity work as well, Bergstedt was the treasurer for the Second Annual
FTM Conference of the Americas in Seattle in August 1996 and is family
law director of the International Conference on Transgender Law and
Employment Project (ICTLEP). A topman who identifies as heterosexual,
at the time of our interview Bergstedt had a significant other and was a
“daddy with nine leatherkids” with whom he did not play at all. He
describes himself as a “Daddy’s daddy,” someone to whom other daddies,
including very experienced gay topmen, turn to for daddying, especially
for advice about problems in their lives. Bergstedt characterized his dad-
dying as providing “stable, nurturing male energy.”

Bergstedt described SM as “a resource or a means of learning more
about myself and growing more spiritually.” Later in our interview, “tool”
was the word he used. Bergstedt said that SM play has “little to do with
sexual pleasure” for him; he is not sexual with most of the people he
plays with and views SM play as more of a “spiritual exercise” through
which he learns “who I am.” Through leatherplay itself, Bergstedt was
able to explore his masculinity and his dominance. He is well aware that
dominance can be feminine and did not simply equate masculinity with
dominance. Instead, he said that SM allowed him to explore “masculine
ways of being dominant” to a greater extent than he could in other areas
of his life. In SM, he said, “I could really live that.” He illustrated the con-
trast with other areas of his life by recounting experiences he had while
serving on the Seattle City Commission on Lesbians and Gays during a
time when he identified as a dyke: “A number of the women who were on
the commission at the time objected to my leadership style as being too
male and too dominant and not processing enough, . . . too goal-oriented,
whereas the men had very little problem with me at all.” When I asked
him whether the women on the commission raised similar objections to
the leadership styles of the men, he answered, “No, just me.” Bergstedt
said that the message he was getting in this experience was that “the way
that I was expressing my dominance and my personality was inappropriate for the gender role that those people perceived me to be in.” In SM play, Bergstedt could “really live” his masculinity through exploring his masculine dominance. This was enabled by the “reinforcement and acceptance” he found for his expressions of masculine dominance in leather community circles, though Bergstedt’s leather community participation, both before his transition and now, has been more extensive in pansexual and gay male circles than in leatherdyke ones. He asserts that, “to a person,” all of the leatherfolk he knows have been supportive of his transition. Participating in SM has allowed him to form a chosen leather family, a family which is “tolerant of difference and change,” thus giving him a safe and supportive environment for self-exploration.

In 1993, I identified as a lesbian and had for two years. For many years, I had not done solosexual because the fantasies that came unbidden into my head scared me. I stayed away from reading books about male adolescence because I was frightened and ashamed by the arousal I experienced in response to scenes in which adolescent boys were punished. As I moved further into lesbian communities, my boy-identification strengthened, and I began exploring queer SM community events and literature. Eventually, I started seeing a young post-punk SM dyke whom I met at a Ron Athey performance. Within a few weeks, I started wearing more boyish clothes and jockey shorts, and I gave myself a boy name: first “Alex” and then “Jake.” My play age quickly settled in at fourteen years of age. Scenes with this dyke, when she played daddy to my boy, centered on punishments in which invented junior high school locker-room sexual high jinks among boys and basketball played elaborate roles. That is, we engaged in fairly extensive psychological play, sometimes dissolving into giggles when our scripts got stuck. After she and I stopped seeing each other, I ran a personal ad for a dyke daddy in the Lesbian News, a free Los Angeles monthly. This time I found someone with many years of leather experience who treated me as “boy” and “son” most of the time we were together. Daddying, for this one, was about love, support, nurturance, and guidance, about helping and teaching, more than it was about punishment. I began to be introduced to other people as “Jake” in settings other than leatherdyke play parties, trying out different styles of masculine self-presentation and behavior, acquiring a leather family, and extending my queer leather community connections and participation. During this time, pronoun usage varied somewhat randomly: either feminine or masculine pronouns were used to refer to Daddy, to Daddy’s best butch buddy who became my uncle, and to me.9 My discomfort with hearing feminine pronouns used to refer to myself solidified here.10

Bergstedt’s stories and mine are quite different, and we construct our stories quite differently. For him, SM as gender technology allowed him to
explore, more fully than he could in other areas of his life, “who I really am,” as he put it. For me, SM as gender technology allowed me to experiment with masculinities as part of a process of self-construction in which I became more masculine, in embodiment, in self-presentation, and in identification. In my self-conception, who I “really” am is a matter of social/cultural facts about my categorical locations; there is facticity here, but it is not natural or essential and is continually changing as culturally available categories change and as I change relative to them. Yet there are some common themes to Bergstedt’s story and mine: themes of explorations of masculinities, and of the reinforcement and acceptance we found in our leather worlds.

Leatherplay can create, so to speak, a culture of two, composed of those two people who are playing together. When I was a boy with my dyke daddy, in that culture of two I was a boy. I was not an adult woman playing a boy’s role or playing a boy, nor was I an adult woman doing boy in some other way. Daddy’s participation was necessary for me to be a boy with her. I was a boy with her by engaging in a gender performativity that made sense to both of us as a boy’s gender performativity. Importing the words Bergstedt chose to speak of himself, Daddy gave me “reinforcement and acceptance” for being a boy. In this culture of two, informed and structured by leatherdyke community gender codes, my communication of a masculine gender identification was legible to someone else, despite my female body. I needed to know that my gender identification could be enacted legibly to at least one other person for it to be convincing enough to me that it could transform from a self-identification fully contained within my fantasy structure to a self-identification with a broader social sphere of enactment. Daddy, of course, could not have read my gender performativity as a boy’s gender performativity if there had not been culturally available constructs of boy into which she could fit it. For my performativity as boy to be legible to Daddy, I had to cite gender codes she understood as a boy’s, though I was not limited to only those boyish codes she had already encountered. Indeed, there were times when I blew it, when what I said or did was way off the boy mark; sometimes these were painful moments, other times they were pleasantly amusing, and some other times they shifted our interaction into one between two adult butches. Los Angeles’s leatherdyke community, particularly as it intersected with Los Angeles’s gay male leather community and hip hop youth cultures, provided those cultural constructs of boy through which my gender performativity was intelligible as that of a leatherdyke boy at first, then as that of a leatherboy as I moved further into the leathermen’s world and as my self-presentation became more masculine. Extending the realm of my gender performativities as boy, or man, beyond situations in which Daddy and I were the only people present opened up new
Through leatherdyke SM practice, I was able to disrupt the dominant cultural meanings of my genitals and to reconfigure those meanings. Possibilities of gender performativity into which I could fit as a boy or as a man; circumscribed those possible performativities in other ways; and extended the realms in which I could create a masculine self, or masculine selves, in relational gendered communications/communications of gender. Relationality of gender, I think, becomes clear in both Bergstedt’s story and mine.

Another aspect of SM as gender technology, which did not come out clearly in my interview with Bergstedt, perhaps because I did not think to ask him about it then, is that leatherdyke genderplay enables a phenomenon sometimes called “retooling” or “recoding” our bodies in trans community discourse. Sexual interactions, along with public restrooms and medical settings, are some of the sites at which dominant cultural connections between genitals and gender are the tightest, so many transpeople must remap the sexualized zones of our bodies if we are to be sexually active. Through leatherdyke SM practice, I was able to disrupt the dominant cultural meanings of my genitals and to reconfigure those meanings. There was already precedence for such deterritorialization and reterritorialization in the leatherdyke communities in which I participated. SM practices that decouple genital sexuality from bodily pleasures provide the backdrop for such phenomena of remapping. One such phenomenon is that inanimate objects—dildoes—sometimes take on some of the phenomenological characteristics of erogenous body parts. So, when Powersurge defined a woman as someone who could slam her dick into a drawer without hurting it, a common response among some butch leatherdykes and some ftms was to say that it sure would hurt if their dicks got slammed into a drawer; a dildo may not be a dick only in the conception, it may be a dick phenomenologically as well. Furthermore, sometimes leatherdykes resignify sexed bodily zones. Among some leatherdyke faggots, an important desideratum is to keep masculinity as seamless as possible during scenes, and gay leathermen’s masculinities often provide the paradigms of masculinity here. Thus, if the body part a leatherdyke daddy is fisting is that which a physician would unequivocally deem a “vagina,” it may be resignified so that its use for erotic pleasure is consistent with male masculinity. It may become a “hole,” “fuckhole,” “manhole,” “boyhole,” “asshole,” or “butthole,” and a leatherdyke boy pleading, “Please, Daddy, fuck my butt!” may be asking daddy to fuck the same orifice into which a physician would insert a speculum to perform a pap smear. Of course, this resignification may prove painful if this boy’s daddy does not understand it. For some ftms who used to be leatherdykes, our abilities to rechart our bodies—I would even say to change our embodiments without changing our bodies, that is, to change the personal and social meanings of our sexualized bodies—began in the queer resignifying practices available to us in leatherdyke cultures. If we invent
novel, idiosyncratic reconfigurations, there is an already-given precedence for male reconfigurations of our bodies, which enables our novel recon-
configurations to emerge into the realm of efficacious performativity and 
social production.

Yet some ftms who used to be leatherdykes may have found, as I did, 
that there were limits to our abilities to reconstitute the sexualized social 
spaces of our bodies. Some of these limits are constituted personally in 
that we cannot ourselves reconfigure the social meanings of certain bodily 
zones, and others may be externally imposed in that we cannot manage to 
communicate our attempts at idiosyncratic rechartings in ways that others 
are able and willing to read. Leatherdyke practice may help us discern 
those aspects of our embodied subjectivities that are susceptible to our 
own agency, and those parts of our bodies that we must change if we are 
to live in our own skins.

Is a leatherdyke daddy a woman or a man? Is a leatherdyke boy a 
woman or a man or a boy? These questions, I think, are badly misguided: 
they presuppose overly simplistic understandings of how gender cate-
gories work, and in so doing they reinscribe the hegemonic stranglehold of 
the dominant sex/gender/sexuality system. Elsewhere I have argued that 
the dominant cultural category woman in the contemporary United States 
is not defined in terms of necessary or sufficient conditions, but rather in 
terms of thirteen criteria none of which is necessary nor sufficient for 
membership in that category. The notion that there is one characteristic— 
usually, though not always, understood as genital—sharply differentiating 
women from men is part of an oppressive sex/gender/sexuality system 
which Harold Garfinkel dubbed “the natural attitude toward gender” to 
indicate its status as a culturally constructed system to which we, as mem-
bers of this culture, are held morally accountable for upholding and for 
which we are held morally accountable for upholding as fully natural. 
Careful analysis of leatherdyke boys’ and daddies’ performativities in light 
of both my earlier descriptive reconstruction of the category woman and 
Garfinkel’s work on “the natural attitude” would show that, according to 
the dominant culture’s principles, some leatherdyke daddies and boys are 
women, some are not, and that in many cases there is no fact of the mat-
ter. Furthermore, as I shall argue, such a question is culturally imperialis-
tic in ways that foreground interesting contemporary gender formations 
within the United States.13

I take it as fairly noncontroversial that gender is culturally constructed 
and that leatherdyke communities constitute cultures that, though they are 
influenced by and may influence the dominant culture, are distinct if not 
autonomous from the dominant culture insofar as they produce cultural 
formations and structures different from those found in the dominant 
culture. Thus, we may legitimately consider “subcultures” as analytically
separate from the dominant culture. Given this, we can see that a question that presupposes that a person has a unitary gender status across cultures with varying gender categories is conceptually misguided, even if some of the cultures in question are subcultures. Instead of speaking of a person’s gender status, we might do well to speak of a person’s gendered status in a given cultural location, at a given time, and for a given purpose.

In a short interlude, I would like to motivate this notion of multiple gendered statuses further by looking at a simpler case, one which does not involve different cultures, but one in which I, again, am my own example. Currently, I do not have a unitary sex/gender status under the law, even under the law in the state in which I was born and reside. My California driver’s license bears the sex/gender designation “M,” and my California birth certificate bears the sex/gender designation “F.” This apparent discrepancy is due to the fact that different state laws and regulations govern change of sex/gender designation on these documents; while I have met the legal requirements to change that “F” to “M” on one, I have not met the legal requirements to make that change on the other and, further, have no particular need to change it. Indeed, my earlier use of “the law” was a setup, for there are multiple laws and regulations that define sex/gender status differently. Birth certificates and driver’s licenses serve different state purposes. For example, one functions for medical record keeping (among many other purposes) in ways that the other does not. Thus, my sex/gender status is specific to state interests and purposes, and my sex/gender status is different relative to different state interests and purposes. Consequently, unitary sex/gender status is, in part, a juridical construction that falls apart on some transsexed (and intersexed) bodies. Unitariness of sex/gender status is a juridical fiction in the strictest of senses; despite appearances to the contrary, there is absolutely no discrepancy between the gender/sex designations on my driver’s license and my birth certificate.

In a broader sense, unitary sex/gender status is a culturally constructed fiction produced by the state, by medicine, by psychotherapy, and by other institutions and discursive structures. This construction of sex/gender status as unitary also breaks down on genderplaying leatherqueer bodies situated in “subcultures” with gender orchestrations different from dominant cultural constructs. From medical points of view, most leatherdyke boys and daddies are women; some male-to-female and female-to-male transsexual leatherdyke boys and daddies may count as men; and some leatherdyke boys and daddies may not have a unitary sex/gender status according to law or according to medicine if their sexed characteristics are not unambiguously female or male. This will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, even from law to law within one jurisdiction, from medical specialty to medical specialty, and even from physician to
physician within one medical specialty. From a broader cultural point of view, some nontranssexual, nonintersexual leatherdyke boys and daddies may not be easily classifyable if they do not clearly enough satisfy the defining criteria of the categories woman and man. Relative to leatherdyke cultural spaces, woman and man may be the most relevant gender categories, and the only two available in addition to neither, for purposes of deciding who gets to participate. These are not, however, the most relevant gender categories for other purposes, such as making sense of another person's behavior, determining how to interact with that person, or organizing sexual desire and sexual practice. For example, when my daddy goes to a women-only play party, probably the first thing she does is pay an admission fee and sign a release form. During this encounter, her operative sex/gender status is woman, since she must be a woman (however that is defined by the party organizers) to be admitted. Probably the next thing Daddy does is stow her toybag and hang up her leather jacket if it's a hot night, because Daddy likes to socialize a little and get into a party headspace before playing. During this time, her operative sex/gender status is leatherdyke daddy, for this is the category through which her interactions with others are organized, especially but not only those interactions in which eroticism is present. Once Daddy is in a scene with a butch faggot boy, once Daddy's dick has become a sensate dick in Daddy's phenomenological experience of his own embodiment and in Daddy's boy's phenomenological experience of Daddy's embodiment, Daddy may be simply a very butch gay male leather bear-daddy. Or something else entirely, depending on the specific content of the interactions between Daddy, Daddy's boy, and any other participants or observers. Thinking in terms of multiple, context-specific, and purpose-specific gendered statuses allows us to make better sense of this cultural phenomenon than does thinking in terms of (two or more) unitary sex/gender statuses.

The sense of multiple, context-specific, and purpose-specific sex/gender statuses I am urging is not simply one in which sex/gender varies from one cultural/historical location to another, nor even one in which individual persons may change their sex/gender statuses over the course of their lifetimes if they make comparably grand changes in themselves, such as those kinds of changes that transsexuals are expected to make. Nor is this the familiar point that gender identity is constructed in interaction with identities along other vectors of subjectivity and power. A very small amount of time elapses while Daddy walks from the entrance of the play party to stow her toybag, and she has not left one culture and entered another during that short walk, nor does she alter her body. Rather, the play party entrance is a spatial and discursive boundary between cultures, a boundary at which dominant cultural sex/gender categories operate for
a specific purpose: to protect members of another, though not fully sepa-
rate, culture from certain types of interference and violence. Once that
boundary is passed, dominant cultural sex/gender categories are not
entirely suspended, but they are superseded by another, incommensu-
rable set of sex/gender categories. Furthermore, as I sit writing this I lack
a unitary sex/gender status under California state law, although my his-
torical and cultural location stays put. The type of multiplicity for which
I am arguing is more profusely multiple than that with which we have all
become familiar.

One could claim, of course, that Daddy is a woman who is also a
leatherdyke daddy, that being a leatherdyke daddy is one way to be a
woman. However, this culturally imperialist claim misses the point that to
insist that leatherdyke boys and their daddies are women, all the time, in
all situations, and for all purposes, is to insist on ignoring the cultural sit-
uatedness—or, more accurately, the multiple cultural situatednesses—of
leatherdyke gender performativities. Further, it is to insist on ignoring
this in favor of upholding a patently oppressive hegemonic sex/gender/sex-
uality system that imposes the overarching categories woman and man at
the expense of eliding the specificities of how sex/gender works in queer
cultural discourses and practices. The decision about which of these views
to accept is a political decision, a decision about whether or not the dom-
inant culture’s sex/gender discourse will be given discursive primacy over
leatherdyke sex/gender discourse. One discourse is constituted and
enforced by much greater power than the other, yet there is powerful
agency in refusing to agree that one is entirely contained within its dis-
cursive structures. There is also power in the creative production of new,
alternative gender formations.

When we consider the same leatherdyke boy or leatherdyke daddy in
different cultural locations, such as competing for a leather title and work-
ing as attorney, we will likely be confronted with a fluidity of gender per-
formativity, and perhaps of gender identification as well. Analytically
replacing the notion of unitary gender status with that of multiple gen-
dered statuses helps make sense of this sort of gender fluidity. Making this
discursive change, however, does absolutely nothing to suggest that gen-
der fluidity is more radical, subversive, transgressive, or disruptive than
more stable gender performativities and identifications. Fluidity of gender
performativity and identification is clearly not necessary to disrupt uni-
tariness of sex/gender—as is shown by the examples of Daddy walking to
stow her toybag and my current situation/s under California state law.

Wild gender multiplicity abounds, and we have some, though not un-
constrained, agency within, and along, the soft, permeable edges of
the multiple, overlapping boundaries of gender categories and incom-
mensurable gender systems. Our urgent creative political work is not the
proliferation of genders, nor are genders countable marks on one line or countable points within a flat, geometric space. Rather, we must familiarize ourselves and others with the multiplicity of genders already available in the curvatures of gendered spaces; we must develop further adept tactics—opened up by the purpose-relativity of gendered statuses—of naming and claiming multiply shifting, resistant sex/gender identifications; and we can use soft, permeable edges as sites for creative production of new, more just genderqueer discursive locations and structures for those of us who are thrust into black holes by location in any of the already given structures of sex/gender/sexuality and who are dislocated from them all.

Notes

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in June 1996. I am grateful to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick for the comments she delivered on that occasion. I would also like to thank Talia Bettcher, Judith Halberstam, Michael M. Hernandez, Robin Podolsky, and Gayle Rubin for productive conversations about the topics I discuss in this paper or for their comments on earlier drafts, and I would like especially to thank Spencer Bergstedt for his participation in my research. My formulations owe much to all seven. This paper, as it appears in this issue, is a preliminary piece of a larger project concerned with widening the conditions of possibility for transsexual and genderqueer discursive agency and cultural creation.


3. While this formulation accurately represents a limited slice of my self-identification when I began transition, it obscures the more complex self-identifications I have since formed in resistance to hegemonic constructions of transsexuality and to dominant manhood. For further investigation of the complexities of ftm self-identifications, see C. Jacob Hale, “Tracing a Ghostly Memory in My Throat: Reflections on Ftm Feminist Voice and Agency,” in *Men Doing Feminism*, ed. Tom Digby (New York: Routledge, 1997).


5. In addition to using *embodiment* with its more common meanings, I follow Steven G. Smith in thinking of embodiment as a process through which the community stipulates what counts as a male/female body, what life will be like in a male/female body in relation to other bodies, what norms (and latitudes) of character and conduct are associated with these bodies, and who is male and female.


9. My use of feminine pronouns to refer to leatherdyke boys and daddies in this article is an artificial and problematic means of communicating with readers who do not and have not participated in leatherdyke community circles.


11. This should not be misunderstood as invoking a butch-ftm masculinity continuum on which ftms are more masculine than butches. When I say that I became more masculine, I am describing changes I made during a specific time period and do not mean to suggest that I am more masculine now than I was then, nor that ftms are more masculine than butches. If anything, I am less masculine in some respects now than I was before exogeneous testosterone, and I am certainly less masculine in some respects than a number of my butch friends. See Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, forthcoming); Jordy Jones, “Another View of F2M,” *FTM Newsletter* 29 (January 1995): 14–15.
