LEATHERFOLK ON THE RUN
LEATHERFOLK, LEATHER RUNS, IDENTITY AND PLACE

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DEDICATION

For my mother
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When a gay male begins to think about leather, he finds that if he is going to be a part of the leather community, he must experience a second coming out. In this coming out, the enemy is ignorance and homophobia from some elements of the gay and lesbian community. Because “leather” is unique to each individual in the leather community, there is no single definition of what leather is. To the participant, leather is, period; to be defined as the experience and life-style unfolds.

Rev. Troy D. Perry, A Meditation on Religion and Leatherspace.

Although there have been regional geographic studies undertaken on gender and sexual orientation and space in gay and lesbian communities, the research and discussion on leatherfolk, the leather community and place in geography has been neglected. The term “leatherfolk” includes men and women, generally representing gay men and to a lesser extent, lesbians, who either engage, or have expressed interest, in various levels of sado-masochistic (SM) and leathersex activities. Sadism and masochism originally derived from writings authored by the French aristocrat Comte Donatien-Alphonse-Francois, Marquis de Sade (1740-1814), and Austrian writer Leopold Ritter von Sacher-Masoch (1836-1895) respectively. Sadism is defined as the pleasure of inflicting pain or humiliation upon another person, while masochism is the pleasure of receiving.
Leathersex is a term not easily defined and is viewed differently at different times by the individuals involved, and becomes blurred when the physical act of sex stops and the SM activity begins. Generally, it is an all-encompassing term pertaining to physical and sexual engagements and relationships that involve SM and other activities.

Fundamentally, leathersex is a form of power exchange between people who perform dominant or submissive roles. A way to determine the definition is to accept each interacting person’s definition and recognizing the power exchanged between them in intimate circumstances, and that any and all of the activities performed can be labeled as leathersex (Mains, 1994).

The meaning of “leather” represents a symbol that distinguishes predominately homosexual males who came and stuck together following the end of World War II. Since then, some leatherfolk had considered leather as an expression of SM and leather sex. Others consider it to be more than an expression, but also about masculinity, rough sex and leather fetishism, motorcycle club affiliations, or other erotic expressions that stand out (Rubin, 1994). Here, Gayle Rubin explains:

These communities exhibited a unique concatenation of sexual tastes, gender preferences and social structures that were expressed by and through the iconography of leather. All of these erotic desires and symbols exist elsewhere and find other expressions in different social contexts, What is unique to gay male leather is this singular combination and the fact that this way of arranging desires, institutions, and symbolism has been an effective vehicle for creating communities, identities and experiences. (Rubin, 1994, 22)

Some leatherfolk in the leather community wear black leather because they find the concept of leather sensual, and enjoy the affiliation with the leather symbols and the imagery of men and leatherspace (Mains, 1994). Leather is an intriguing part of SM and
leathersex, but there are those who engage in it and do not wear leather. In contrast, there are those who have sexual fetishes that are connected to the look and feel of leather and yet do not engage in leathersex. As Geoff Mains explains:

Sometimes, these men partake of few or none of those sexual practices commonly associated with leatherspace. Still others may be into scenes as diverse as piercing or bondage but wear little closer to the cultural costume than Levi denim jeans and plaid shirts. Yes other men wear leather as either members of clubs or as bikers, there are also men who wear leather for all the reasons. They are all tribesmen. (Mains, 1994, 41)

The symbolism of black leather has changed over the course of decades since post World War II. This is exemplified in Joseph Bean’s work *Leathersex* where he states, “Wearing leather in 1959 was to be considered an outsider of a relatively extreme sort. This was less the case in 1969, hardly relevant in 1979, and not true to any stigmatizing extent in 1989” (Bean, 1994, 158). It was the constant redefining of leather symbols, and the attitudes and clothing styles of dress that made the leather community socially acceptable within the gay community and outside in the larger general society. It also made leatherfolk and the leather community socially and sexually associated with power and defiant symbolism (Bean, 1994; Kamel, 1995b).

The leather community, similar to the larger gay community, constitutes a wide variety of people who share an interest and desire to a particular aesthetic association with leather (Stein, 2004). Though the leather community residents are primarily gay white males, it is a pansexual community that includes lesbians, bisexuals and transgender individuals. Ethnic minorities and heterosexuals have also been physically or socially involved but their presence is smaller in number.
There has been literature published in anthropological, psychological and sociological studies on leatherfolk, the leather community and sexual identity among gay and lesbians, but little has been addressed in the geography discipline. Discourse on this should increase because of the relationship between the construction of identity and place and how identity and spatial location are related to one another (Graham, 2006). Barbara Weightman reference this thought by mentioning that homosexuals received little attention from geography even though they have an impact on space. One reason is that homosexual behavior and lifestyle is generally considered unacceptable, and discourse on gay sexual issues is considered taboo (Weightman, 1981). This can be compounded when many countries around the world including the United States view homosexuals as a deviant group and homosexuality as an inappropriate act.

Though there has been an increase in geographic studies on gays and lesbians in the past 30 years, there remains a paucity of discourse on leatherfolk, space and place in geography. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, geographers moved from a quantitative process of identifying locations of gay men and lesbians and their environments, to a more qualitative one by which research focused more on identity and space. Some examples include social and urban studies on gender and space (Alder, 1992); on public space and citizenship (Hubbard, 2001; Bell and Binnie, 2004); and on lesbian and gay geographies (Bell, 1991). Other research included homosexuals, economics and urban spaces (Knopp, 1990) and the discussion on homosexuals, urban locations and cultural identity including ‘gay ghettos’ (Levine, 1979; Castells and Murphy, 1982).
There have been a handful of geography researchers who have addressed the role of sexual identities and performativity among leatherfolk. The works of Butler (1990, 1993) have been particularly influential in shaping geographers’ understanding of how the body exists in discourse. In addition, Marxists, feminists and queer theorists have discussed ways of rethinking sexual identities that allow for different approaches while addressing gender and its relationship to heterosexuality, and to the theoretical insights of performativity in relation to identity (Butler, 1990). But the leather community has been a marginalized group within the larger gay communities that have long been recognized as shaping social geographies, as explained by David Bell:

Lesbians and gay men consistently remain the least visible ‘others’ in the eyes and words of geographers. This is despite acknowledgements that their lives and lifestyles are defined to a lesser or greater degree by both their sexuality and the reaction to that sexuality from other sectors of society. (Bell, 1991, 323)

The marginalization of the gay community makes it difficult for leatherfolk who are also contributors in shaping social geographies. From the shorelines of geography, geographers have constantly looked out towards the horizon and seen leatherfolk from a safe distance, but have not ventured out to sea to discover them. But once geographers row out and board the ship, they must then determine which methodological and epistemological framework will work best to further interests in gay research in geography (Binnie, 1997).

In addition to geographical publications, there have been books and articles published on the lives and lifestyles of gays’ and lesbians,’ including those identified as leatherfolk. Mark Thompson’s collection of essays were written by leatherfolk and pertained to social, sexual and spiritual aspects of leather, and Steve Lenius, who writes
on the “leather life” in Lavender magazine, wrote on the history and culture of the leather community and leather lifestyle. Other authors also publishing works on leatherfolk include Larry Townsend and Geoff Mains, both of whom have written books and articles on the introduction and socialization of leatherfolk and the leather community (Thompson, 1991; Townsend, 1972, 1983; Mains, 1984). These authors are discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

The Leather Community

The leather community is a subculture organized around physical and sexual activities and erotic iconography, symbolism and semiotics that distinguished it from the larger gay and lesbian community. This subculture provides its members with “self-identification as a group, a network within which individuals focus their primary relationships, and it creates a way for individuals to emit larger cultural values in terms of their own experiences” (Mains, 1984, 25). First appearing in major metropolitan cities in the United States in the 1970s, the leather subculture later grew and developed in other urban centers and had spread into most industrialized countries (Rubin, 2000). This spread has continued through the early years of the twenty-first century where it has diffused further through the urban centers and into suburban and rural locales. The intensity of leather spaces is strongest in places where there is a higher concentration of leatherfolk who network within their leather community. As they network further away into rural areas, the intensity tends to diminish.

The leather community consists of a spectrum of social and economic categories, yet within this subgroup there is a propensity toward homogeneity culturally. It is a
community that engages in various levels of thought, social interaction and engagements of the leather lifestyle, where traditional notions of masculinity are the norm. Leatherfolk within the community have been successful at establishing public institutions such as bars, bathhouses and clubs and other civic and social organizations. It is in these spaces where experienced practitioners can engage and socialize, and the novice can discover and learn. It is within this community that sexual identities of leatherfolk are cultivated and performed.

One of the focal points in the social life of leatherfolk is homosexual bars, an institution that is the primary and necessary locus for gays and lesbians (Achilles, 1967). Within leather communities, gay bars become a central meeting place where leatherfolk, like their gay and lesbian counterparts, can socialize and interact. They become an important institution for people who live in the leather subculture, providing a space where they can meet and converse socially. Some bars offered themed events like leather nights while others have leather-themed spaces allocated for socializing as part of a larger bar complex. Leatherfolk who frequent gay and leather bars were showing some form of involvement or support for the leather community.

Another institutional phenomenon is the appearance of gay and lesbian clubs and organizations. Leather clubs are fraternal or social in nature, and can be organized with military influenced dress codes and hierarchal codes of conduct, or more casual regulations on dress and forms of activities. Many contemporary leatherfolk and leather clubs are pansexual in orientation and include heterosexual individuals to their ranks. Leather clubs generally play an active role in the gay community by raising funds for
worthy causes through themed “bar nights” or other social events, involvement in the fight for gay and lesbian rights, or educating the people about safer sex practices. They also provide an avenue for people who have an interest in the SM and leathersex, the leather community and leather lifestyle. Many people are interested in some aspect of leather, and are adventurous enough to explore their curiosity.

Inside the leather community are leather clubs, whose origins stem from heterosexual and homosexual motorcycle clubs, and which began to appear in major metropolitan cities in the early 1970s. The structure and organization of leather clubs were modeled from motorcycle clubs that formed in the post World War II era. Leather clubs provided an avenue for gay men to socialize, discuss and explore things that constitute “leather.” They were also instrumental in helping the advancement of the leather lifestyle. The association between motorcycles and masculinity is common among men in the leather community, and was a natural fit for leather clubs to emulate hetero- and homosexual motorcycle clubs. This emulation included leather runs, which referred to a club’s motorcycle riding and camping trip. The contemporary use of the term has broadened to include social events hosted by a leather club and attended by members of other leather or gay motorcycle clubs, and by those individuals who are not associated with a club or leather organization (Lenius, 2010).

Like the larger gay community, the leather community consists of people with a wide variety of different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds. In larger metropolitan areas, leatherfolk are geographically congregated within urban and suburban locales. While some people in the general public may associate leather with gay men and extreme
SM orgies, the leather community displays a “unique concatenation of sexual tastes, gender preferences, and social structures that is expressed by and through the iconography of leather” (Rubin, 1994, 22). The uniqueness of the leather community’s symbolism and meaning is that to leatherfolk, leather is important. In terms of leather culture and symbolism, Gayle Rubin explains:

They are generally quite opinionated and vehement about leather; leather comes up in a multitude of contexts; there is immense cultural elaboration surrounding leather; and there are cultural restrictions surround its appropriate use or appearance. …Leather stands for the values of this community. It symbolizes brotherhood, independence, rebellion, masculinity, freedom, physical prowess, and sexuality. (Rubin, 1994, 23)

It is the leather qualities and characteristics that make this subgroup unique and dynamic and anthropologists and sociologists have studied the leather community ranging from its early formative years with motorcycle clubs following World War II through the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century (Nardi & Schneider, 1998).

The terms “leather” and “leatherfolk” are utilized in this study to indicate a broad cultural formation that is centered on the sexual fetishes involving leather and the individuals who engage in them. As a subculture of the larger gay community, the leather community generally involves sado-masochism (SM), bondage and discipline (BD) and role playing (which does not necessarily involve the giving or receiving of pain), and other forms of physical and sexual fetishes or kinks under the banner of leathersex. These activities are under the banner of “safe, sane and consensual” between all parties involved.

Leathersex can range from engaging in hard-core SM and different types of bondage and fetishes, to those who prefer exotic and erotic sexual practices or more
conventional sensual activities and role playing with leather attire and leathersex equipment. Wearing black leather does not necessarily mean someone is into SM or other forms of leathersex, and not all leatherfolk who dress in leather are into SM. Some individuals may prefer the voyeuristic pleasures of an activity or “scene.” Some may enjoy the imagery of power and masculinity that is prevalent in the leather culture while still others prefer the more conventional sexual activity or what is termed vanilla sex between partners and simply like the feel or the aesthetics of leather. Vanilla sex is a term used to denote conventional, mainstream sexual activity between partners that includes garden-variety intercourse, fellatio, and mutual masturbation. In any case, many gay men and lesbians who engage in SM and leathersex are engaging in a “social” fetish, an acquired or learned fetish that has little to do with an inherently kinky predisposition for alternative erotic practices of whips and chains (Harris, 1997).

The history of leatherfolk is vast, and leather runs have been an intricate part of the growth and development of the leather community. It is a subculture in the gay and lesbian community that individuals have identified themselves. Not all leatherfolk are members of leather clubs, motorcycle clubs or organizations, but some participate in leather runs held in many parts of the United States. Because of the little attention and discussion about this dynamic subculture in geography, I feel this is an opportunity to study leatherfolk and their interactions with geographical space.

For this study, the leather run hosted by the leather club The Conductors L/L (Levi/Leather) of Nashville, Tennessee was chosen. The Conductors is one the oldest surviving leather/levi/biker clubs who are active participators in the gay and leather
communities through their philanthropy activities. The Conductors host monthly Club nights at a gay bar called the Chute Complex as part of their visibility and networking in the leather community. They also hold special events to raise funds for their area HIV/AIDS charities that help in the gay and leather communities.

Little attention has been paid to leatherfolk, and less has been said on leather runs and place. The characteristics that define the leather run event are special and unique to those in the leather community who participate in them. It is a place where leatherfolk continuously mention the cultivation and fostering of brotherhood and camaraderie, and the sense of belonging within leather run spaces. It is with this thought and reasoning that I began to pursue this study, and I feel this is an opportunity to study leatherfolk and their interactions with space, specifically at leather runs, and how performativity plays a role in the social construction of sexual identities of leatherfolk.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine how leather runs facilitate the construction of sexual identities among leatherfolk through performativity. Within the examination of the leather run, a secondary goal of this study was to develop an understanding of the identity performativity and place among leatherfolk. Finally, this study sought to increase exposure to a neglected subculture within the larger gay community and inform about leatherfolk, their identity and sexuality. These objectives will be accomplished by using the observation and participatory method as a form of information gathering while attending a leather run. This study will focus on the leather run space, how it is organized and assembled, and how the participating run attendees engage and interact within the confines of a leather space. The use of Judith Butler’s
concepts of performativity will provide discourse on how sexual identities are constructed. Here, I hope to develop an understanding of the performativity of identity and place among leatherfolk.

Organization of the Thesis

The remainder of this thesis is organized in the following manner. In chapter two, information on space and place are examined, along with publications on performativity, identity and place, and on leatherfolk and the leather community. In chapter three, the cultural history and background information on leatherfolk, leather clubs and leather runs are discussed. This chapter also includes the explanation on how leather run space is arranged and organized. In chapter four, the research design and method of observation and participatory is established. The discussion includes the benefits and drawbacks of using this methodology in the study of leatherfolk, leather runs, identity and place. Chapter five contains the summary of my observations and the analysis of the leather run. This entails the explanation on how the run space provides the performance of identities through the descriptions of the run events that enfolded. In chapter six my conclusions on leatherfolk, sexual identity and place are discussed.
Place n. A particular area in space where people and environment interact over time to give it characteristics distinct from those of surrounding places.

The Penguin Dictionary of Geography

Queer theory is an intellectual movement developed in the 1990s that centers on the significance of sexuality and gender and their interrelationships. Defining it leads to a broad description because it draws on gay, lesbian, and pansexual identity and sexuality, and describes works in gay and lesbian studies. What queer theory does is challenge the dominance and ubiquity of hetero-normativity. Queer theory’s relationship with geography is increasingly recognizing the implications of the other in that it demands that geographers recognize how hetero-normativity can blatantly or subtly taint the geographies that are researched and conclusions drawn on. Geographers have pointed out queer theory’s penchant for historicity, language and literary texts while ignoring the spatiality of those representations (performance of sexual identities in space), even when they are analyzed explicitly (Bell et al. 1994).

Sexuality and sexual politics are present throughout space regardless of scale, and that sexual interaction can be found in private or public spaces, and can be located in urban or rural places. Because of this, space and place affect people’s sexuality. It
affects the way people live, and where they interact (Johnston and Longhurst, 2009). Gill Valentine offers an example of the way place and sexuality interact by explaining:

Spatial visibility (e.g., in terms of the establishment of so-called gay ghettos or various forms of street protest or Mardi Gras) has been important to the development of lesbian and gay rights. In turn, these performances of sexuality dissidents’ identities (re)produce these spaces as lesbian and gay spaces in which sexual identities can be, and are forged. (Valentine, 2001, 5)

While geographies of sexualities have been researched since the 1980s, the geography discipline has witnessed an increased number of, and diversified studies on, sexualities, space and place over the past fifteen years. These studies have its origins from theories of sexual identity and performativity developed by Judith Butler (1990; 1993) where she explained that “the sexuality discourse centered on how sexed and gendered performances produce space, and how spatial formations shape the ways in which sexual dissidents present and perform their sexualities in public spaces” (Browne, Lim and Brown, 2009, 9).

These two concepts are important to this study, and the research on leatherfolk and leather runs is centered on the leatherfolk culture, and sexual identity and performativity. In order to establish what discourse has been presented up to this point as the basis for proposing my own contribution, it is necessary to briefly evaluate each of these areas separately to demonstrate their contributions to the overall subject. In doing so, it will show how I approached this study of leatherfolk, leather runs, identity and place as a way to add to the knowledge on the leather subculture. Here I study leatherfolk and describe their hypermasculinity and leather symbolism, and the evolution
of this phenomenon and the effects of their performativity in spaces which are heterosexually constructed.

**Performativity**

Geographers have been drawn to Judith Butler’s concepts of performativity in feminism and queer theory as a model for thinking about sexual identity (Bell et al., 1994), while other geographers have tended to misapply Butler’s theory of performativity (Gregson and Rose, 2000). In either case, Butler’s works are influential in outlining performativity, a theory of subject formation in which she discusses the meeting of essentialism and social constructivism, and provides a model for social discourse by stating that gender is a performance without the nature of being. This means that gender stands not for what a person is, but what that person does. Butler also discusses Sigmund Freud’s (1856-1939) psychoanalysis therapy of human subjectivity (body, self, other, and self-other relations) with discourse analysis in that identities are not simply performed on the surface of the body, and what is performed always operates in relation to what cannot be performed or mentioned. In addition, Butler’s discussion of performativity articulates a theory of an individual’s relation to social expectations in that performances are not freely chosen roles and those heterosexuality expectations dictates that a person cannot exist outside gender (Butler, 1990; 1993).

The performativity of gay identities has been primarily a Western concept. It takes the concept of performance and develops it in a linguistic concept by suggesting that language consists of performative utterances where discourse becomes social practice. It is in the repetitive nature of this action that the practice becomes
performative. Butler contends that “Performativity should not be understood as a singular or deliberate “act,” but rather, as a reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler, 1993, 236). In her work *Bodies That Matter*, Butler developed her concept of performativity based on what Michel Foucault examined in his work *The History of Sexuality*, where individual bodies are marked by gender, along with race, class and sexuality, and how these categories are destabilized through performativity. Sexual identities are seen to be the outcome of discourses that are played out on the body. Focusing on the performativity of sex/gender, Butler’s writings disturb any neat mimetic correspondence between sexuality, biology and corporeality. Regardless of the correspondence, her works on performativity is influential in the social sciences, and many researchers have applied Butler’s concepts to further research in feminism and queer theory.

**Performing Identities, Performing Places**

The definition of the word identity is the “set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group” (Webster’s II, 2001, 548). Individuals develop a sense of identification with a group or organization, and identifying oneself ethnically, religiously, politically or socially reinforces a sense of belonging. In addition, individuals develop attitudes towards identity and groups which they can interact with, and relate to the understanding of the meaning of identity. Basically stated this translates to, “Who do I associate with?”

Understanding identity as a social construction has shown that individuals have multiple identities, which are categorized by a person’s gender, race and social status.
Depending on the location and circumstances a person experiences, a urban, professional gay male living in New York City simultaneously displays an individual who identifies himself differently when he is cheering on the New York Giants at a football game, as a New Yorker traveling abroad, a professional when he is at work and at home in his neighborhood, as a gay male when he is out at the gay bars, or participating in a cause for gay rights or AIDS research, or as a leatherman who is attending a leather run (Holloway, 2003). People’s interactions will vary depending on which identity they display, and their identity will perform differently when they converse with colleagues at work or having dinner with close friends. Their identity can vary further when one factors in the geographical space the dinner is being performed, the locale where it is taking place, and the time dinner is occurring. It is important to note that there are those in the gay and lesbian communities who do not identify themselves as leatherfolk and not all gay communities have a leather community within. Leatherfolk who do identify themselves as such, and engage or express an interest in SM and leathersex may be frowned, looked down upon, and at times marginalized by both homosexuals and heterosexuals.

There are numerous leather runs and events throughout the United States and abroad that are held each year. The Conductors’ Anniversary leather run entitled *Track XXIII* was associated with the Nashville leather community. The run attendees that I observed at this leather run were not born into leather. Their leather identity was socially constructed through the adaptation of SM and leathersex, the leather culture and the leather community’s social norms. It is my impression that some run attendees had already reached what I would call their “leather enlightenment” while others were
accomplishing their leather endeavors through involvement in leather clubs and attending leather runs. The contextualized nature of leather runs signals the importance of space and place, and the understanding of the socially construction and presentation of a person’s sexual identity.

The French sociologist-philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s work *The Production of Space* describes states that “(social) space is a (social) product and identifies three levels of human spatiality: spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces” (Lefebvre, 1991, 33). *Spatial practices* refer to the processes, flows and movements that produce the relations between objects and products. It is “perceived in the realm of the everyday, manifest as movements, migrations, routines and other journeys through and in space that influence the ‘where’ of human endeavors.”

*Representations of space* take on a physical form, and are the “physical items which serve to represent and make sense of space.” *Representational Spaces* refers to the “embodying complex of symbolisms linked to the underground side of social life” (Lefebvre, 1991, 33). This relates to spaces that are lived through everyday life, emerging from the relationship between *spatial practices* and *representations of space* (Hubbard, 2002). Lefebvre continues by mentioning that the production of space is intimately connected with social arrangements, and that a change in culture affects a change in the production of space.

In the case of leatherfolk, Lefebvre would suggest that their engagement in the leather community, whether it is visiting a gay bar, a bathhouse, or a leather run while wearing leather dress that displays masculinity and leather symbolism all relate to the
leather spaces leatherfolk experience when they are engaging in this particular leather identity.

Space is more of an abstract concept than place. Spaces constitute areas and volumes while places have space in between them (Cresswall, 2004). The elements that transform space into a place are memories, feelings, social connections and cultural traits. The humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan’s work *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, explains space and place which require each other for definition, and that if space is thought of as the allowance of movement, then place is pause, and each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place (Tuan, 1977). Tuan summaries this concept by explaining that:

What brings as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value… The ideas ‘space’ and ‘place’ require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place. (Tuan, 1977, 6)

In addition to the codependency of space and place as a definition, place is also a term that has a variety of meanings in a dictionary sense. It can be a position or point of physical space as in a particular geographical area or location (a street address, a public square... ), or complex as in a person’s position in society, their relative wealth, status and so forth. Place may also refer to an individual’s or family’s relative status and relationship as compared to other individuals, groups or families. The political geographer John Agnew outlined three aspects of place as a “meaningful location:”— location, locale and sense of place (Cresswell, 2004). Agnew explains that location is a specific point or position in relation to everywhere else while locale is the actual shape of
the space or a setting and scale for a person’s daily actions and interactions. *Sense of place* is the personal and emotional attachment people have to a place (Agnew, 1987). Applying Cresswell’s aspects to a leather run, the specific location would be the leather run host hotel and the participating venues (gay bars) in the schedule of events. The locale would be the leather spaces within the hotel and gay bars, and the leather run attendee’s sense of place would be their sexual identity and their leather presence is felt within the confines of the leather run spaces. In turn, the leather run space holds a special meaning to the socially construction of their sexual identity.

In general, place is a term that is both simplistic and complicated. Simplistic because its definition is straight-forward in meaning that society uses it to describe a street corner as in ‘locale’, or describe a statement like “stop by my place for dinner” as in ‘ownership’ or “this is my place, not yours” where the notion is on “privacy and belonging.” Place is complicated because it is hard to go beyond the common sense level that is entrenched in our minds and everyday lives in order to understand it in a more developed way (Cresswall, 2004). Agnew’s three outlines are easily understood for gay identities and the gay community. Gay males are predominantly urban, professional, middle-class white males (Knopp, 1990a). Their rural and suburban counterparts, along with ethnic and non-white individuals and working-class gays and lesbians do not always share the same gay concepts and ideologies. Their “acts” vary between individuals in different sociological and economic environments and surrounding culture where they reside. Urban and suburban gay males view their locales differently, but the gay sense of place can be shared.
Regardless of the individual’s socio-economic status, homosexual lives and lifestyles have increasingly come into the public eye mainly due to the dynamic political and social events occurring during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Bell and Valentine, 1995). Research in identity and community gained momentum during this time with the increase in Gay Rights and Gay Liberation movements, which mirrored the Civil Rights and Women’s Rights movements following the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City’s Greenwich Village.

The public and political interests in the emergent gay communities and identity politics caught the interests of anthropologists (including Gayle Rubin), psychologists and sociologists who began to establish research in the social sciences on the phenomenon. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, academic studies in sociology began to document the lives of gay men and lesbians. Their notions of identity and their communities were being researched, and the focus was on seeing how homosexuals created their own sexual identity and communities within a larger heterosexual social system (Nardi and Schneider, 1998). David Bell provides an insight into the importance of researching homosexuality and space:

Some of the geographical works on homosexuality include a history of either national or local gay communities, emphasizing changes in the position and status of the study group, as well as shifts in opinion and reaction from society around it, and any wider constitutional or attitudinal changes which impinged on the experiences of lesbians and gays and the spatial expressions of these experiences. In the USA, these have been particularly concerned with analyzing the role and impact of gay communities on the urban fabric at a neighborhood. (Bell, 1991, 324)

The research and discourse in Geography on gays and lesbians have been increasing since the early 1980s, but the geographical studies of the leather subculture
have not been as prolific as those from other social sciences. There have been publications on leatherfolk, their lives and lifestyles, but little has addressed the geographical application of space beyond the regional approach. The academic community has had challenges in examining gays, lesbians and space including homophobia, heterosexism and the inability to address or discuss the subject matter or issues (Blunt and Wills, 2000; Weightman, 1981). Primary forms of information for researchers and scholars have been found elsewhere in anthropological, sociological and psychological sources.

It was not until the early 1980s that Geography began to excel in research on sexuality and gay men and lesbians. Publications by sociologists Martin Levine, Manual Castells and Karen Murphy, and geographer Barbara Weightman and Lawrence Knopp began to address gays and lesbians’ identity and their relationship with space and place. Although there was literature on homosexuality and spatial distribution during this time, the main focus was spatially mapping primarily gay male populations in cities such as Houston (Weightman, 1980), San Francisco (Castells and Murphy, 1982), and New Orleans (Knopp, 1990a), and the service concentrations in Boston, New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles (Levine, 1979). Much of the work produced during the 1980s and early 1990s were developed from a Marxism or neo-Marxist urban political economy perspective (Brown, 2002). During this time, the focus centered on gay gentrification of urban neighborhoods, the roles of gay and lesbian interest groups and social movements in urban politics that were emerging, and the emergence of gay and
lesbian residential and commercial spaces in cities (Castells and Murphy, 1982; Knopp, 1990a; 1990b; 1992).

Weightman proposed a challenge in her 1981 commentary, *Towards a Geography of the Gay Community* where she states that the “homosexual has received little attention from geographers, yet...the sizable population is having an impact upon the landscape through a variety of spatial expressions” (Weightman, 1981, 9). Weightman explains that the impact on homosexual space and the center of gay institutions and activities generate a special cultural ambience. Gay enclaves (also called gay village, or gay ghetto) that consist of gay bars, bathhouses, restaurants, bookstores, theaters (sic), apparel shops, and a variety of other retail and service establishments all cater to the gay and lesbian clientele, and that these gay spaces within larger landscapes are unique (Weightman, 1980). In general, Levine, and Castells and Murphy research that focused on urban, space and gay communities are landmark publications. In addition, Weightman’s research on gay bars as on component of gay landscapes was ground breaking in Geography. The research material and the possibilities for studying gay and lesbian communities were, and still are, tremendous.

Publications on gay and lesbian communities in the social sciences are prolific, and Levine’s work entitled *Gay Ghetto* is a resource that addresses the emergence of the gay urban community and identity. Levine discusses the scale of the homosexual population where the concentration of gay men who reside in metropolitan areas is larger in proportion to the total population of the city. Here, he stresses that the gay community has a sense of “safety in numbers.” An example of the proportion theory is reflected in
San Francisco where 17 percent of the population was gay residents (Castells and Murphy, 1982). In Levine’s other work entitled *Gay Macho*, he provides a sociological study of the emergence of the gay male culture during the 1970s. His work stems from the gay liberation movement that was occurring in the early 1970’s where he discusses gay masculinity, hypermasculine sexuality and gender confirmation, and continuing through the beginning of the AIDS crisis of the early 1980s where he chronicles the AIDS epidemic (Levine, 1998).

Other important works on gay communities include Castells and Murphy’s article *Cultural Identity and Urban Structure*, where they discuss the spatial organization and analysis of San Francisco’s gay community in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Though their research method was quantitative in scope, space is the predominant theme where homosexuals in San Francisco are very visible, and have mobilized their communities to where they can defend their identity within their realm.

Other writers whose works centered on the gay community include Nancy Achilles and Joseph Harry, where they discuss gay bars and the gay urban life. Achilles’ thesis and later publication on the homosexual bar was one of the earliest writings about gay men and their social behavior in a public institution (the gay bar), and how it is a part of their living environment. Here she explains that the influence of the group upon the behavior of its members is one aspect of the complex social situation and that in areas where large homosexuals live, and where their social visibility is greatest, reactive attitudes on the part of the larger society are inevitable (Achilles, 1964). Her work is important because of the difficulty in researching homosexuals in their social spaces in
the early 1960s environments where tolerance and acceptance was rarely found in local
governments and law enforcements.

Like Achilles work, Harry’s article *Urbanization and the Gay Life* discusses gay
bars including leather bars, but in terms of the similarities between them and heterosexual
bars, both culturally and economically. He discusses scale, and the size of the city’s gay
and leathermen population as an important component to a leather bar’s continued
operation. He continues by pointing out that the larger number of leather bars in a region
is proportionate to the higher number of leathermen who frequent them (Harry, 1974).

By the 1990s, research in Geography and sexuality had increased and
geographical studies were expanded beyond place and quantitative analysis. Publications
by David Bell, Jon Binnie, Lawrence Knopp and Gill Valentine provided research on the
association of sexual identity, space, and performing places (Blunt & Wills, 2000). This
is reflected by Knopp in that sexual identity and practices are embodied and inherently
spatial from local to global scales (Knopp, 1992). Bell concurs by stating, “The study of
gay and lesbian geographies needs to be brought out in the open in order to fully
understand the role of sexuality and sexual preference in shaping social space” (Bell et al
1994, 328). In addition, Binnie comments about geographers in that they need to
understand which methodological and epistemological frameworks work best to further
interest and discourse in homosexual research in geography (Binnie, 1997), and that
geographers have sex lives too (Binnie and Valentine, 1999).

Most of the discourse in geography literature addressed people and space in terms
of gender preferences and differences and the experience between gender, sexuality and
space (Hubbard, 2002; Valentine, 1992, 1993a). British geographers Gill Valentine, David Bell and Jon Binnie provided discourse regarding representation, desire and performance (Brown, 2002). Bell and Valentine’s publication Mapping Desire is considered the beginning of geography discourse on sexuality and space. This work presents information on sexualities from a geographical perspective, and how the hetero-sexed body has been appropriated and resisted on different levels of scales through sexualized places and spaces (Bell and Valentine, 1995). Bell and Valentine both have written on sexual identity and the production of space (Bell, 1994; Bell and Valentine, 1995), while McDowell has focused on the masculinity and femininity varying over time and space (McDowell, 1999).

Other publications concentrating on homosexual space include Benjamin Forest, whose article West Hollywood as Symbol discusses gay identity and place using Christopher Street in the West Village area of New York City and West Hollywood respectively as a focal point. Forest concentrates on sexuality and place and the definition of a gay identity in West Hollywood through a series of articles appearing in the gay press during a campaign for the municipal incorporation between mid-1983 to late 1984 (Forest, 1995).

How places can shape identities of oneself and with peers in the lesbian communities is extensively studied by Gill Valentine and Linda McDowell. Valentine has concentrated her studies on lesbian geographies where she provides a balance of queer perspective that is biased towards geographic studies on gay males (Brown, 2002). Her articles (Hetero)sexing Space and Desperately Seeking Susan discuss space
perceived and experienced through non-gay environments which influence the character of lesbian friendships and lesbian networks. McDowell’s articles *Performing Work* and *Body Work* explores the role that gendered and sexualized spaces can play in disciplining bodily through physical build, stance and manner of self-presentation, along with dress, makeup and hairstyle (McDowell, 1994; 1995).

More recent publications on sexuality and space include Bell’s research on hetero(sexual) practices and space pertaining to public sex and partner-swapping or multi-partner sex that occurs in secluded urban sites. Knopp’s research continues to focus on feminist and queer geographies in social and urban environments where suburbanization has been analyzed as a form of hetersexing in terms of capitalism and racism (Brown, 2002; Knopp, 2004). Two recent compilations are Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst’s *Space, Place and Sex*, and Kath Browne, Gavin Brown and Jason Lim’s *Geographies of Sexualities*. Both works draw on feminist and queer theories, and geographies of sexuality, and how they are associated with sexuality and space "community."

In general, Marxist, feminist and queer theory, along with research on sexual identity and space, has continued throughout the beginning of the Twenty-First century and show no signs of abating. The phenomenon with queer theory research lately is that it has scattered and spread freely into other subfields in geography, namely cultural, feminist and political geographies. Geographic identity and sexuality is more broadly defined than in the past. This includes the construction of heterosexuality, and the emergence of sexual minorities of bisexual and transgendered groups in studies, along
with non-geographers who have provided studies on sexuality including race, class and
genders in metropolitan areas. This includes the diffusion of gay communities that have
spread beyond the urban city limits and into suburban and rural spaces

Leather and Leatherfolk

The term “leather” refers to a distinctive subgroup of male homosexuals who
began to coalesce into coherent communities in the late 1940s (Rubin, 2000). It is an all-
encompassing term for people with a variety of sexual preferences and sexual identities,
and who are part of, or associated with social organizations and institutions that blend
together to help establish the leather community. This cultural phenomenon stems from
the post World War II era when leatherfolk and the leather lifestyle began its evolution.
It emerged from the gay communities where men began establishing motorcycle clubs
and organizations in California and elsewhere in the United States modeled after their
heterosexual motorcycle club counterparts.

In the 1960s, the leather community emerged as a subculture and by the 1970s,
leather runs had become a common form of socialization among leatherfolk, and an
institution in the leather community. Many leather clubs and organizations have origins
in motorcycle clubs, and had since expanded to include lesbians and other sexual
minorities. Leatherfolk is an all encompassing term that includes people who share
interests in what is commonly viewed as unorthodox sexual activities or leathersex.

The participation in the leather lifestyle is broad, and it constitutes participants
who express their interest in the privacy of their homes, while others practice in public
spaces with affectations or eroticism. Eroticism goes beyond the hand-holding level of
affection. In either case, they are the people who helped build the leather community through organizations, institutions, communications, and education, and there have been tributes in the development of literature on leatherfolk, leather sex and leather lifestyle.

These tributes included the increased leather-themed periodicals and newsletters in the 1970s including Drummer Magazine, Dungeon Master, First Hand, Growing Pains: and Bound and Gagged, The Leather Journal, Stallion and Threshold Submissions in the 1980s and 1990s. These publications represent only a small percentage of magazines published that cater to the leather community. Other publications include leather and motorcycle club newsletters like Wheels, published monthly or quarterly, along with publishers who print theme or activity specific magazines.

Though these publications informed, educated and entertained leatherfolk, it is the books that elevated information levels on the leather lifestyle. Authors who began writing in the 1970s and 1980s wrote specifically on leathersex and the leather lifestyle. They include Guy Baldwin, Joseph Bean, Geoff Mains, Mark Thompson, and Larry Townsend, among others. Their works explained what being a leatherfolk member entailed, and what it meant to be part of a tribe—a group of people with shared interests and desires for leather, SM and leathersex. Their publications discussed leatherfolk and the leather community through writings and articles that addressed self-identification and personal expression, and the contemporary issues of leathersex and leather lifestyle of the time. They provided an avenue for discourse on people’s needs, desires, and the things that turned people on with leather both physically and aesthetically. Discussions on various fetishes and kink, and the training and explorations into bondage and SM helped
promote and encouraged the education, socialization and integration of veterans and neophytes alike into the leather fold.

In the early 1970s, it was risqué to attempt a gay publication, yet Larry Townsend’s 1972 book *Leatherman’s Handbook* was a ground-breaking publication on leather. For the first time in book form, the leather codes of conduct and culture that the underground leather scene practiced at the time came into the public eye. Discussions on discipline, honor, brotherhood and respect came to light, along with strict formality, leather etiquette, voluntary servitude and fetishistic behaviors were covered. It was the first book that many gay men read and discovered that their own kinky side was shared by others, and the trials and tributes of engaging in leather and SM activities.

Townsend followed this publication with the *Leatherman’s Handbook II* in 1983. In addition to volume I, his new publication included revised and updated information on leather and SM activities. Included in the revision were discourse on the advent of AIDS and its impact on the leather community, which was then spreading across many countries around the world. Both volumes, along with several editions are still in print and are considered the cornerstone of understanding what leather is.

Other noted authors who provided discourse on the “how to” of leathersex and leather lifestyle publications are Jay Wiseman, Joseph Bean, and Guy Baldwin. Jay Wiseman’s 1996 book *SM101: A Realistic Introduction*, and Joseph Bean’s 1994 book *Leathersex: A Guide for the Curious Outsider and the Serious Player* are both comprehensive surveys on sadomasochistic practices and activities. Wiseman discusses
leathersex in a conversational, personal, and at times, humorous style on topics including finding partners, safety considerations, relationships, organizations, and interactions.

Where Wiseman’s publication is more general, Bean’s is more specific in subject matter. Here he discusses in more detail “getting started” in leathersex, and goes into more finite detail on pleasure and pain, relationships and safety. What Bean contributes and where Wiseman is deficient, is in the discourse on the history of leathermen and the spirituality of leathersex that can transpire. Understanding the origins and gaining enlightenment can be informative to those expressing interest in, and reconfirming for those who are engaging heavily in the leather activities and lifestyle.

Baldwin’s 1993 book *Ties That Bind* is a compilation of articles he first published in Drummer Magazine, Frontiers, Checkmate and Manifest Reader in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This publication has similarities with Townsend and Bean in that he discusses the leather “how to” but also brings out contemporary issues regarding leather relationships, the leather community, and the personal enlightenments that are the results of experiences in SM and leathersex activities. What makes this publication interesting is that Baldwin is a psychotherapist who practiced in the field where professional colleagues viewed, and may still view, homosexuality as a mental illness. His association with his clients and members of the Chicago Hellfire Club provided a wealth of material in numerous periodicals that eventually lead to this publication on leatherfolk identity, and self awareness on a physical, sexual and spiritual level.

The mentioned authors contributed heavily to the literature on the leather community and their works are read by leatherfolk experts and novices alike. They
provide a glimpse into the cultural realm of leatherfolk rarely ventured into by the general public beyond those interested in SM and leathersex. Authors like Mark Thompson and Geoff Mains concentrate their works on human sexuality and identity, and many of their writings provide discourse on the leather subculture, its history, and spirituality within the gay and lesbian communities. In Townsend’s “Handbooks,” sexual identity is developed through the physical cues (clothing, places…) and the mental (symbolist image, interpretation…), whereas Thompson and Mains express sexual identity as deeper and more spiritual.

Thompson was a regular contributor to The Advocate magazine, the oldest continuing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) publication in the United States, and has published works on gay spirituality and awareness. In his 2001 book Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice, he provides twenty eight essays by authors and practitioners of both sexes who contribute works about expanding spiritual awareness, along with historical witnessing, psychological growth, coming out to leather, and what black leather means. Discussions on goddess worshippers and other pansexual activities emerged. Pansexual (sometimes called omnisexual) is defined as a sexual orientation that is characterized by the potential for romantic love, aesthetic attraction, or sexual desire towards people regardless of their gender or sexual identity. Other emergences include the darker elements of leathersex including sadomasochistic rites by a self-proclaimed shaman and the use of Nazi paraphernalia.

Geoff Mains’ 1984 work Urban Aboriginal provides discourse on both the spiritual and cultural aspects of leather, leatherfolk and the leather community. What this
Canadian writer with a Ph.D. in biochemistry contributed is that leatherfolk are not only independent entities dressed in black leather, but also a tribe, a group of people who share similar feelings, interests and physical and spiritual goals (Mains, 1984). Mains’ writings mixes leather theory and life experiences with the concept that leatherfolk is an indigenous society (a tribe) within a gay subculture. Chapters entitled Spiritual Euphoria (spiritual enlightenment and confictions), Bondage and Inner Peace (strength and frailty), and Celebration of the Hidden Animal (raunchy) provide insight into the spiritual realm of leatherfolk.

Where Main’s discourse is on the spirituality of leather, Don Bastian’s book *Chainmail 3SM* discusses the physical aspects of leather. As an autobiographical work, he draws from his own sexual experience and the involvement in a leathersex relationship between himself and two other gay men to form a relationship between three people. He references a knight’s chainmail armor similar to leatherfolk leather as a visual armor and that the leather culture is “the result of generational education where each experience becomes a link of a chain of self-awareness as a community and a culture” (Bastian, 2002).

Two other authors who have also contributed to the subject of leatherfolk and leather lifestyle include Daniel Harris with his *Rise and Fall of Gay Culture*, and Peter Hennen with his work *Faeries, Bears, and Leathermen*. Each devotes a chapter on leathersex (Harris), and leather image (Hennen), where Harris talks about the process of gay men entering the leather community by “taking off the sneakers and the angora sweaters of the swish and stepping into rugged dungarees and leather jackets of Marlon
Brando” (Harris, 1997, 183). Along with the transformation of the weak, effeminate gay male to a hypermasculine being, he argues that mainstream SM and leathersex has caused leatherfolk to lose what made it valuable. In his discussion on spatial relations, Harris explains that desires deemed forbidden by society and emotional needs prepared and consumed by gay men and lesbians find their leathersex activities liberating, educational and rewarding (Harris, 1997). It is the spatial metaphors of a dungeon as a temple where the desires and needs are fulfilled and ritual sexual rites performed to achieve enlightenment. In Hennen’s work, he refers to similar analogies with his chapter on leather, hypermasculinity and performativity. Instead of a dungeon of enlightenment, he travels to a camp where a leather run hosted by the leather club the Sentinels is held. Here, the space of the event is where leathermen clothed themselves in their armor that emulates the hypermasculine motorcycle culture.

For information on lesbians and leathersex, the book *The Second Coming* by Pat Califia and Robin Sweeney provides discourse on the history of “consensual power exchange,” a term coined by Cynthia Slater who founded the Society of Janus in San Francisco. There are other historical essays that provide discourse on women and SM support groups. Some of those groups include Briar Rose, Lesbian Sex Mafia, and The Outcasts.

Finally, a comprehensive anthology on leatherfolk and the leather community in San Francisco is Gayle Rubin’s anthropology dissertation *The Valley of the Kings*. This work played an important role in establishing the historical timeline of leatherfolk and the leather community. It is a complete and thorough discourse on the history and evolution
of the leather scene in San Francisco’s South of Market area during its peak of gay
cultural influence. The place that is the Valley of the Kings is an area that has a rich
history in leather, leathersex and hypermasculinity. It is a place that conveyed an image
of power and toughness, sexuality and masculinity (Rubin, 1994). Though not in
published form, Rubin has released sections of her dissertation in Archaeologies of
Sexuality, and in Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice. The following
chapter covers the history on leatherfolk, leather clubs and leather runs.
CHAPTER 3

LEATHER HISTORY

“Leather is both a uniform of individuality and a badge of community.”


Leatherfolk

The leather community today is a pansexual, diverse body of individuals who share an interest and desire to a particular aesthetic associated with leather that stems from the post-World War II era and images of American masculinity (Stein, 2004). While sado-masochism (SM) and bondage and discipline (BD) are among some of the activities indulged in by leatherfolk and are closely linked to the history of gay SM, the term leathersex is not synonymous with BDSM.

The aesthetic appeal of black leather among men and women represents a broader sense of the community where one’s physical and sexual fantasies and inclinations can be realized in a non-judgmental way from within. It is the aesthetics of black leather that provides connotations of masculinity, strength and power in a society that disapproves of homosexual activities between men, and between women. With leatherfolk, the look, scent and feel of black leather sexualize everything it comes in contact with, and what it represents (Thompson, 2001). Thompson states, “leatherfolk see black leather not as
stylish affectation, but rather as a daring symbol of cultural transgression and personal transformation.” In short, it does not matter if one chooses to wear leather; it is the intentions beneath it that are important. Regardless of the intentions, the leather community is where the leather culture stems from and permeates throughout public and private spaces that constitute gay bars and bathhouses, retail establishments and restaurants. In a sense, the leather culture is a beacon in society as explained by Mark Graham when he states that “Gay leather culture gets itself noticed. It is conspicuous, blatantly sexual, and clearly not attempting to pass as heterosexual or be respectably homosexual. This is why it has sometimes provoked hostile reactions from both inside and outside the gay community, especially when associated with forms of radical sex (Graham, 1998).

The “leather lifestyle” among leatherfolk includes a number of identities, sexual preferences, relationship structures and social organizations. Many of these are part of the sado-masochistic realm while others are part of the hypermasculine, power and sex appeal of black leather, which are based on the seductive and alluring aspects of leather. For some, black leather is about aesthetics. Those who wear leather enjoy the affiliation with the men and images of leatherspace and find the concept of leather sensual (Mains, 1984). For others, leather becomes a reflection of a way of life, a set of values, and a type of spirituality (Lenius, 2010). In either case, individuals are not born into leather; leather identity is socially constructed through adaptation of the leather culture and its social norms. One way this is accomplished is through involvement in leather clubs.
Leather clubs and other social organizations are relatively recent and culture specific phenomenon that began in the mid-twentieth-century in the United States among homosexual men who shared similar interests. It has since expanded to encompass enthusiasts of all genders and sexual orientations. They are identified as “leatherfolk,” who share interests in certain unorthodox sexual and/or physical activities or “leathersex” within the confines of cultural or “leatherspace.” Leatherspaces are not a single plane but multi-dimensional spaces where public and private spaces converge. This is a space encompassing physical, social and spiritual grounds anchored by layers of experience of territory, ownership and community or tribal expectations (Mains, 1984).

Leathersex is an all-encompassing term involving activities and relationships including bondage and sado-masochism (BDSM) among other activities. It is a form of role-playing or lifestyle choice between consenting individuals who engage in the application of activity or exercising control (power exchange) over each other to achieve physical and/or sexual tension, pleasure and release through pain and power play. The wide spectrum of activities may include, but are not limited to, roles of dominance and submission (D/s), fetishism, sexual orientation towards particular parts of the body, objects or materials including leather, rubber and latex, various forms of bondage and restraining, discipline and SM (BDSM), the manipulation, and the giving and receiving of physical and mental pleasure and/or pain. Some of the many physical aspects of leathersex include cock and ball torture (CBT), electric stimulation, fisting, flogging, spanking, and tit torture to list a few of the more mainstream leathersex activities. Though leathersex is an all-encompassing term, it is not limited to these listed above.
The black leather dress that leatherfolk wear as part of their leather wardrobe may contain a few articles or a complete leather ensemble of leather jackets, shirts, pants, chaps, boots and bar vests of various styles. Leatherfolk may also have in their wardrobe denim jeans, uniforms (police, military, etc.), rubber and latex clothing, cowboy and Western clothing, leather accessories and other forms of fetish wares including arm bands and collars, chest and body harnesses, and jock straps to name a few. These leather articles form the basis of the leather code of dress as summarized by Guy Baldwin:

Always wear boots, butch ones, and preferable black. Always wear a wide black leather belt—plain, not fancy. Never mix brown leather with black leather. Never mix chrome or silver trim with gold or brass trim. Long pants only, Levis or leather, and no shorts. Chaps indicate more commitment than levis, and leather pants more commitment than chaps, especially when worn consistently. Leather jackets must have epaulets (bike riders excepted). Head gear is reserved for Tops (Dominate) or experienced or heavy bottoms (submissive) only. (Baldwin, 1993, 111)

Many leather bars in the United States had strict dress codes that prohibited clothing articles that were deemed “feminine including dress shirts, knitted golf-style sport shirts, suits, ties, dress shoes, sandals, sneakers, women’s clothes, and other attire considered inappropriate, along with perfumes and cologne” (Rubin, 1994, 30). Black leather and the masculine symbolism it represents impart a sense of power and display hypermasculinity that the leather communities are most recognized for. There are those within the leather community who are attracted to and collect the leather/biker look, but do not engage in SM or leathersex. They may wear black leather articles but perform genital or “vanilla sex” between partners.

Leatherspace, where much of the SM and leathersex is performed, involves what Geoff Mains describe as a “multi-dimensional checkerboard of niches defined by dress,
sexual interest, attitude and social association and linked to a variety of clubs, bars, play areas and social organizations” (Mains, 1984, 41). There are leatherfolk who wear black leather for its affiliation with men, masculinity and sensuality. Some wear leather as a way to enhance role playing, a leather or SM scene, or sexual activity, while others wear leather because of their association with clubs or as bikers. Some leatherfolk wear leather for all these reasons.

The clothing choice of leatherfolk is viewed differently by different leatherfolk. It is also viewed differently by the mainstream gay community, who see it as a costume as opposed to a leather uniform or second skin. Some people associate leather with extreme SM activities where partners engage in physical violence between each other. Regardless of the outsiders’ viewpoint, leatherfolk extend their leather identity and lifestyle beyond the gay bars, clubs and other institutions, and into the wider array of public and private spaces. Older leatherfolk who are more established in their jobs and careers, income and place in society, and where their private and public lives are more intertwined, have less to fear by way of repercussions or backlash from their colleagues and “mainstream” social life.

More recently, younger leatherfolk have also been engaging in these same institutions more frequently and easier than the previous leatherfolk generations and their visibility is expanding. Many who participated in leathersex and the leather lifestyle have found contacts and engagements from gay bars, social organizations and private networks. In the past, homosexual SM networks went underground because of the exclusion of gays from heterosexual nightclubs and social organizations even though they
had similar interests in leathersex activities. Lesbians on the other hand were more often accommodated in heterosexual places than their gay male counterparts. In any event, the most common meeting places where leatherfolk connected and networked with each other are the gay and leather bars, bathhouses, leathersex venues and events and leather clubs (Bean, 1994).

The emergence of leather as associated with leatherfolk began after World War II when gay war veterans were returning home. As Guy Baldwin explains, for many gay men of that period, their military service during wartime was their first homo-social experience (Baldwin, 1993). It was the first time many of them were away from their homes, families and familiar surroundings. It was also the first experience of male-bonding during periods of high stress. They learned the value and pleasure of discipline and hard work from the military and retained many elements from their military experience, including the military honor codes and lifestyle, its formal structure and hierarchy, and the sense of brotherhood and camaraderie among men. This is summarized by John Weal when he explains:

The “Old Guard” motorcycle troops of the Army, after World War II, were where the history of leather has been documented. As the men came out of the war, the Army awarded them their motorcycles. It was the combination of these wild men renegades wearing leather on their motorcycles, with the BDSM rough-sex men that merged the two names in the late 40’s and 50’s so that the term “Old Guard” became attached to the leathermen of the BDSM who rode motorcycle. (Weal, 2010, 7)

As the male war veterans were arriving home, they brought with them restless energy, military-surplus items including motorbikes, riding gear and apparel, and the fondness for machinery (Stein, 2004). They were influenced by the military’s formality,
order and discipline. Some of the shared interests of the earlier leatherfolk and their heterosexual biker counterparts were military uniforms and requisite leather dress, military style haircuts and motorcycles, many traits symbolizing power and masculinity.

Anthropologist Gayle Rubin noted that the symbolism of black leather emerged during this time, primarily inspired by the motorcycles and biker clothing of post-World War II motorcycle riders, and by urban street gangs who adopted the leather dress without the motorcycles. Here, motorcycles and leather jackets became a poor or working-class male symbol of physical strength and personal power, and projected a persona of being tough (Rubin, 1994). This persona is reinforced by the rise in automation and industrialization following World War II. The rise of technology and machinery fueled the masculine narratives yearning by returning veterans as explained by Daniel Harris:

In the early gay biker clubs, studded leather jackets were the ceremonial vestments of a vehicular religion whose central totem was an unlikely god, a mode of transportation, a device manufactured by a highly industrialized culture. The leather fetish in its earliest forms was rooted in the body of iconography that grew up around heavy equipment and the internal combustion engine, a symbol of industrial power. (Harris, 1997, 200)

Fueling this persona and the increase in interest in the growing number of motorcycle clubs was Stanley Kramer's 1953 outlaw biker film *The Wild One* starring a leather-clad Marlon Brando. Based on the short story *The Cyclists’ Raid* by Frank Rooney, Brando’s portrayal of the character named Johnny, a member of a fictitious Black Rebels Motorcycle Club became iconic. Brando’s portrayal of Johnny projected a macho image with the dark glasses, black leather jacket, and a white riding cap at an effeminate angle, along with the lazy tilt of his head, his swaggering insolence and cocky
walk, and the smoldering sensuality that he emanated created a cult icon of hypermasculinity (Tanitch, 1994). Robert Tanitch’s description of Johnny as a taciturn biker leader in his pictorial analogy of Marlon Brando’s acting career states that:

Brando’s inarticulation was so articulate that disaffected youth, far from heeding the warning, immediately identified with Johnny’s message (‘Nobody tells me what to do… Nobody is too good for me… I don’t like cops’) and went out and got the black leather gear and motorcycles. (Tanitch, 1994, 54)

The black leather dress of this rebellious and individualistic youth, wearing a NYC Perfecto 618 leather jacket over a tight tee-shirt, riding cap and aviator sunglasses while riding a 1950 Triumph 650cc 6T Thunderbird, struck a cord with many young men—both homosexual and heterosexual. It was rumored that sales of black leather motorcycle jackets, Triumph motorcycles, denim jeans and the like increased after the movie’s release, even though it was a moderate commercial success. The now cult classic and its leading star quickly became a transgressive icon of “raw” and “erotic” hypermasculinity with the motorcycle as a sexual metonymy for Brando’s masculinity.

In addition to The Wild One, another movie that portrays the masculine persona was Nicholas Ray’s 1955 teenage bad boy movie Rebel Without a Cause starring James Dean as a rebellious teenager named James “Jim” Stark. To some, James Dean’s persona and imagery is not as dramatic as Marlon Brando’s character, but it may have been influential to others in the early days of the forming leather community. As Rubin notes, “The Wild One (and other less memorable films of the genre) did not create the symbolics of leather. The film provided new spins and wider access to a symbolism that was already established” (Rubin, 1994, 30). In any case, the stylistic cues and physical
items (symbols) were influential to both the heterosexual and homosexual young man who drew upon them to display his masculinity to society as a whole.

The dual influence of the military and the motorcycle gang launched the attitudes and institutions that became the essential features of leather and the leather community (Stein, 2004). The dichotomy of the War veteran’s military experience of formality, hierarchy, order and discipline cherished by “Old Guard” leatherfolk and the biker who represented disorder, rebellion and individualism became the stylistic foundation of the leather culture (Rubin, 1994). The culture itself has members who adhere to what some view as a more conservative style of leather dress code and conduct (some would label it “Old Guard”). Those who identify themselves as such, view themselves as leatherfolk who value the community hierarchy, strict leather code of conduct and leather dress, as well as the military traditions that leather culture inherited from its military origins. This is opposed to the “New Guard” labeling, where some would describe leatherfolk as dismissing or rejecting the hierarchical and military organization and traditions that the leather culture originally followed and maintained (Lenius, 2010). It is important to keep in mind that these two labels are not defined specifically as described and the degree of meaning between the two varies among those in the leather community regardless of the person’s political leather belief or span of leather involvement in the community.

The formal group dynamics of a motorcycle club and the individual expression of liberation that leather represented was a perfect match for many homosexual and heterosexual men who were searching for a masculine persona in their sexual identity.
This dichotomy had lasting influences that carried over into the formation of another social phenomenon, the leather club.

The Leather Club

There are a number of leather clubs in the United States whose purpose is to provide people interested in leathersex with a forum in which to share practical information, ideas, feelings, health and safety tips in a supportive atmosphere (Bean, 1994). Leather clubs are social organizations within the larger gay and lesbian communities that are grouped under the collective label of leather/levi/biker. The leather clubs consist of members (or brothers as they are sometimes referred to) who share similar leather identities and modes of sexual expressions; are reinforced through rituals and customs; and codified in formal bylaws or statements of purpose (Ridinger, 1998). In general, leather clubs provide an opportunity to engage in safe, sane and consensual SM and leathersex between interested parties, and provide social and sexual spaces where one can meet people who share similar interests in leathersex (Bean, 1994).

The origins of leather clubs began with the emergence of the leather culture after World War II. By the late 1940’s, heterosexual motorcycle clubs were forming across the country, and continued through the 1950’s. This also led to the rise of the motorcycle run hosted by the motorcycle club. A motorcycle run was a weekend event or retreat where members from other clubs could gather and engage in motorcycle competitions and rallies. It was also an event filled with brotherhood and camaraderie that motorcycle run spaces provided to run attendees. Motorcycle runs were traditionally held near or on
the host club’s anniversary date, and often took place at camp sites or other open spaces where motorcycle competitions or “rodeos” could be performed.

While heterosexual men were returning home, gay veterans were also returning, and had the same shared interest in the masculine persona as heterosexuals. They were exploring ways to covertly meet other gay men to converse and engage, and the motorcycle gang structure provided a model for the formation of homosexual groups. One way was to associate or become involved with the motorcycle culture. Gay motorcycle clubs began to become organized with the first being in 1954 when the Satyrs of Los Angeles was formed. Many of the founding members were war veterans and modeled the club’s structure and code similar to heterosexual motorcycle clubs where the hierarchies of the military, including officer positions, with the addition of a road captain were emulated as explained by Gayle Rubin:

Bikers and leathermen often sport emblems, also called “colors,” which identify the wearer with a group, gang, or club. Leather can be personalized by adding trophies, such as pins commemorating runs or other special events, or items that simply express the individual personality of the wearer. Some men keep adding pins, patches, and other decorations to their caps, leather jackets or vests, or denim overlays in such a way that a person’s affiliations, idiosyncrasies, and histories of participation in community events are exhibited. (Rubin, 1994, 25)

The Satyrs and the gay motorcycle clubs that followed created back patches or “colors” resembling battalion patches similar to heterosexual motorcycle clubs as a form of identification. A club’s colors (either banners or embroidered cloth patches placed on the back of leather riding vest) are insignia that identified the organization and its members. Smaller patches were created by some clubs to identify associate membership in one form or another. Along with back patches were cast metal pins or friendship pins
that were similar to wartime sortie or lapel pins. They were worn on the member’s leather club vest or riding hat to identify themselves with an organization, or commemorate motorcycle runs, leather runs, or other special events. Members carried these pins wherever their travels took them, and distributed and/or exchanged them at various motorcycle runs between members as a way of extending friendship and brotherhood among club members. Motorcycle club patches and friendship pins still remains a common form of club identification and affiliation among members in both motorcycle and leather clubs.

Other gay motorcycle clubs were established during the late 1950s and the degree of formality and discipline varied within each institution. Some were formal with protocols and club guidelines including the need for apprenticeships as part of the initiation while others were less so. By the 1960s, heterosexual motorcycle clubs were expanding, and many were opening their own bars to be used as “home” bars. It was common for the motorcycle club or its club members to have full or partial ownership of the heterosexual bar. It was a convenient way for a club to have a space of their own as opposed to another establishment that may not have been as cooperative or one that had restrictions.

Over time these bars became the motorcycle club’s “home bar” where their club colors would be displayed and their club pride would be experienced and felt within the confines of the home bar space. It was also a time when homosexual bikers began patronizing these bars, and eventually made them into a center of activity. As Gayle Rubin explains, homosexual bikers were superficially indistinguishable and mingled
easily with their heterosexual biker colleagues. The worlds of SM, leathermen, and leather-bikermen were intertwined, and that heterosexual and homosexual bikers mixed and mingled with little conflict because of their commonality of leather, motorcycles, and painful memories of the war (Rubin, 1994). John Weal summarizes the evolution of the leather bars from biker bars where motorcycle men would hang out. From there, renegade bars emerged where men wore basic leather but did not own motorcycles yet they enjoyed the aesthetic persona and leathersex activities. From the renegade bars came the offspring, known as leather bars (Weal, 2010).

Guy Baldwin summarized on what was happening at this time when he states, “the bike clubs and the bars where they hung out became the magnets of their day which attracted those gay men who were interested in the masculine end of the gay spectrum, but it was the leather men who defined the masculine extreme at the time” (Baldwin 1993, 110). Gay and leather bars became more than a watering hole establishment. They became a community center, communications hub, a communal living room and a sanctuary for leatherfolk to gather and converse (Davolt, 2003). They also became a political forum to discuss leather and the leather community, along with a hunting ground, marketplace, stage, and test track for physical and sexual encounters in SM and leathersex (Davolt, 2003).

Aesthetically, both heterosexuals in motorcycle clubs, and homosexuals in the motorcycle and leather clubs shared similar stylistic characteristics in their choice of leather dress. What separated the two groups was the purpose for which the leather garments were worn. Bikers wore denim jeans and chaps, leather jackets, vests, and
engineer boots for protection from road hazards and the elements, specifically from wind burn. For the homosexuals, black leather attire was a form of aesthetics and a representation of power and masculinity (Ridinger, 2000).

This aesthetics is exemplified by the Mineshaft dress code of appropriate leather dress needed to enter this establishment. Located on Washington St. at Little W. 12th St. in the Meatpacking district of Manhattan in New York City, the Mineshaft (1976-1985) was one of a dozen popular nightclubs and sex clubs in the area that catered to the city’s burgeoning gay SM subculture in the 1970s and 1980s. It was a premier members-only, all-male club that was open around the clock from Wednesday night through Monday morning. The Mineshaft had a strict dress code and the approved dress for entry included the following: motorcycle leather and western gear, Levi’s jeans, jock straps, leather action ready wear, uniforms, tee-shirts, plaid shirts, leather and motorcycle club overlays and patches. The following was not permitted: business suits, ties and dress pants, rugby shirts, designer sweaters, tuxedos, disco drag or dresses, and no heavy outer wear is to be worn in the back room called the “playground.” In addition, the Mineshaft had a policy that no colognes or perfumes were to be worn.

The popularity and desire for their own bar space lead to leatherfolk opening up their own “leather” bars. Leather bars, like their gay bar counterparts, are important because they are defining spaces for sexual identity (Warren, 1998). They are places where one can converse, socialize, and make sexual contacts among others in the leather community. They are also places where the constructions of sexual identities are
cultivated, performed and maintained, of which the general public in the United States remained unaware.

If the general public was unaware of leather bars and the leather subculture before 1964, they became fully aware of it afterwards when LIFE Magazine ran a fourteen page article entitled “Homosexuality in America” in their June, 26, 1964 release. The significance of the article was not so much that it drew the attention of heterosexuals to homosexuality, but more importantly, it drew attention to the leather community within the larger gay community. An excerpt from the magazine article describes the first leather bar, the popular Tool Box on the corner of Fourth Street and Harrison in the South of Market area of San Francisco:

On another far-out fringe of the “gay” world are the so-called S & M bars (“S” for sadism and “M” for masochism). One of the most dramatic examples is in the warehouse district of San Francisco. Outside the entrance stand a few brightly polished motorcycles, including an occasional lavender model. Inside the bar, the accent is on leather and sadistic symbolism. The walls are covered with murals of masculine-looking men in black leather jackets. A metal collage of motorcycle parts hangs on one wall…. (LIFE Magazine, June 26, 1964)

All of a sudden homosexual men saw images of leather clad men mingling in front of the famous “Tool Box” mural by artist Chuck Arnettt (sp) at the leather bar Tool Box in San Francisco. It was this article that led to the leather community becoming not only visible to those gay men who were unaware, but made it possible for others to enter and engage in the leather community. A whole new “leather” world out there opened up for many men in the mid-1960s.

Towards the end of the 1960s, leather bars were flourishing, and many were establishing “black rooms” or play spaces, which were black-painted back rooms, used
for various forms of bondage, SM and other leathersex activities. Simultaneously, gay bathhouses and sex clubs were emerging, with some providing space or “back rooms” for the same activities.

The leather community continued to expand through the 1970s. During this time, new publications emerged and targeted gay men including periodicals for leatherfolk. Their origins were from earlier “physique” magazines of the 1950s and 1960s, including titles like Face and Physique, Popular Man, Modern Adonis and Manorama among other publications, and catered to the gay male clientele which helped fuel the persona of leather and masculinity in the following decades. This persona stemmed from physique photography or “beefcake” genre from where post-World War II gay photographers developed a distinct genre of homoerotic “physique” periodicals (Bienvenu, 1998). By the mid-1960s, leather themes began to be employed in this genre. Images of erotic biker characteristics evolved from Hollywood’s construction of the heterosexual tough-guy hypermasculinity of the 1950s into a reduction of masculine posture of transgressive homoeroticism in the 1970s. The most noted images of this time were those by Finnish artist Touko Laaksonon, or Tom of Finland (1920-1991). Tom of Finland is noted for his stylized homoerotic and fetish art that influenced the leather culture of the mid- to late-twentieth century. His drawings of masculine icons of motorcyclists, policemen, military personal including sailors and soldiers drawn with masculine bodies, tight fitting clothing and excessive groin areas fueled the hypermasculine that was being craved at the time.

The periodicals of the 1970s shared information about SM activities, leathersex and propagated sexual and black leather fashion styles and trends of the time. It was also
the time when gay men discovered the concept of personal ads. Many leatherfolk were meeting others for SM and leathersex activities via personal ads advertised in some of the leather periodicals of the time. It was a way to diffuse the concepts of leather to a wider audience and provided an avenue for the leather experience to engage and the novice to explore leather. By the 1980s, there was a greater integration of the leather community, but this was also the decade when the disease Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) emerged and contributed to the loss of leatherfolk and undermined the leather communities in many metropolitan areas. It was a time of social transition where newer leather clubs were more open and less strict on membership and member sponsorship of a newcomer in the previous decades. Gay men interested in joining a leather club were not subject to initiations and probationary periods, and were able to hold officer positions upon acceptance to the club. This social transition continued through the 1980s and 1990s as more leather clubs were forming and growing in numbers.

It was the feminist and gay liberation movements of the 1960s that helped transform the leather club. Leather clubs adopted a more democratic form of organization, and operated on a more open and liberal philosophy. Though the liberation movements continued, the pansexual leather movement was more difficult to realize. Heterosexual and lesbian clubs began to form separately from their gay male counterparts, and began forming organizations among themselves up into the 1990s.

To this day, a handful of leather clubs maintain their gay male only status with other groups of individuals being invited or accepted on a special basis, or as honorary or associate members. Overall, leather clubs are pansexual, and are more liberal in their
membership requirements and accepting lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered and heterosexuals into their fold. Over time, gay motorcycle clubs slowly became independent of the motorcycle by shedding the machinery from their realms, and removing the need or requirement to join their organizations. In the process, many clubs were changing their status from a motorcycle club to a leather/levi (L/L) club. As a result, leather clubs grew increasingly in numbers through the rest of the 1970s and into the 1980s. What was not removed was the motorcycle run event to which it evolved into the leather run.

The Leather Run

Leather runs (also known as club runs) are organized events traditionally held over the course of a weekend where attendees from many parts of the United States participate in a single or multi-day event. The schedule of a run includes banquets and competition where friendship, fellowship, brotherhood and camaraderie are engaged. The term run originated among motorcycle clubs and referred to a club’s motorcycle riding and camping trip, or making a bike run to another town to visit other motorcycle club(s). The term has broadened over the years to include weekend social events held annually that are hosted by a leather club and attended by members of other clubs and GDIs (Lenius, 2010). GDI is an acronym for God-Damned Independents, a term used to describe individual(s) who are not members of a leather/levi/biker club though they may be supportive of clubs and their activities.

The demographics of run attendees vary from run to run. The attendee’s age can range from youthful to mid-sixties or higher, and their physical appearance can vary from
fit and athletic to overweight. Their socio-economic backgrounds also vary with attendees representing many professions and wealth (Mains, 1984). They travel from many parts of the United States via planes or motorcycles to attend the leather event.

Most leatherfolk no longer own motorcycles, and many motorcycle clubs no longer require one but the terminology stayed in gay leather clubs. A large run generally attracts one hundred or more attendees from different clubs covering a wider geographical area, and is more likely to be held at a hotel. This is different than the smaller, more localized venues similar to camp outings where the attendance attracts attendees from a smaller region, and its attendees may include the host club members, members from regional clubs, and their friends.

The leather community has been participating in runs since the 1950s, when motorcycle clubs began to form in California after the War. By the 1970s, leather clubs and organizations were established, with some referencing the motorcycle clubs as a foundation and leather run events ran similar to biker runs:

Bike clubs tend to include events that turn the whole affair into something of a motorcycle version of a rodeo. Competition in all kinds of straight and stunt riding are programmed into the run, often including some pretty strange trick riding events where buddy riders may be picked up or dropped off along the way. Cross-country scavenger hunts and riverbed races, parades with bikes dressed to the nines, and how-slow-can-you-go competitions can be expected. (Bean, 1994, 28)

The characteristics of leather runs hosted by leather clubs are similar to a festive party as opposed to biking outing or rally. The run theme and atmosphere can range from, for example, Mardi Gras or a circus. For this study, the leather run had a science fiction and Star Trek theme. Since the 1970s, leather runs have been modeled after motorcycle runs
in similar function and format, and have been one of the sources of networking and socialization for leatherfolk. The association between motorcycles and gay men has been the identification of a masculine individual that men in the leather community identify themselves with, as opposed to the feminine or weak persona that gay men are generally associated with. Not all leatherfolk are members of leather clubs or gay motorcycle clubs, but many participate in leather runs.

The contemporary definition of a motorcycle run is generally a gathering of motorcyclists who participate in a structured social event. It is defined as a private event, usually held over the course of a weekend, which is hosted and entertained by leather or motorcycle club(s) or other organizations. The characteristics of the event include social activities, competitions and banquets where people with similar or common interests and lifestyles, gather to participate and socialize among peers. Over the years, leather runs have become institutions where socialization with others, and the cultivation and fostering of identities is common.

Leather runs have also become organized with the establishment of regional organizations. The multitude of leather run events scheduled each year eventually became cumbersome between regionally located clubs. Since the 1960s, many leather and motorcycle clubs joined together and formed regional councils to help combat the congestion of run events that would overlap and interfere with other run schedules and activities. The organized councils that emerged were: Atlantic Motorcycle Coordinating Council (AMCC) founded in 1969, the Mid-American Conference of Clubs (MACC) in 1974, Texas Conference of Clubs in 1975, The 15 Association in 1980, and the Southeast
Conference of Clubs (SECC) in 1995. In addition, the San Francisco Bay Area Leather Alliance (formerly the Leather Forum of San Francisco), the National Leather Association International, the Houston Council of Clubs and the New England Leather Alliance or NELA (formerly known as NLA: New England) were established, along with organizations in Europe and Australia, including the European Confederation of Motorcycle Clubs (ECMC) in 1974 and the Australian Club Run Association (ACRA) in 1993. The mission and goals of these organizations was to promote and coordinate the calendar dates of leather and motorcycle club-run primary events and inter-club activities. They also develop a standard system of points for competition and participation at leather and motorcycle runs for all participating clubs to adhere to, and to help in the promotion of brotherhood and camaraderie among member clubs and their club members.

A leather run is a structured event attended by club members and non-members alike, though the majority of the participants are associated with an organization either as a full, honorary or an associate membership. The leather run is traditionally centered on the host club’s anniversary and the overall concept of the run is socialization, camaraderie and brotherhood. Leather runs can constitute a day event or a mini-conference that covers two, three or four days over the course of a weekend. They can be small and intimate with a little as twenty-five attendees enjoying an evening celebration with an anniversary dinner or a weekend camping retreat. They can also be a larger venue of two hundred or more attendees with formally organized activities and workshops, complimentary cocktail parties and afterhours play times, and formal and informal banquets with awards for clubs and the attendees who participate.
Prior to the run event, many hours are involved in the planning and preparation, the assembling, the actual operation of the leather run, and the post-run disassembling and clean-up. The process is time-consuming, and the similarities between leather runs and weddings are striking when all factors are considered as explained by Steve Lenius. Lenius describes the analogy along the lines of planning and hosting a wedding with the addition of leathersex play spaces. In Lenius’ article entitled “Recipe for a Run,” he describes the process of planning and developing a run as similar to a cooking recipe. First published in Lavender in 2003, Lenius describes the pre-run functions as first:

Procure a place to hold the run; come up with a run theme; make food and beverage plans including kitchen reservations and/or catering; design, produce and distribute advertisements, press releases, registration forms along the lines of the run theme; make arrangements for receiving registrations and run payments; find people to present run-themed workshops, seminars, demonstrations and other entertaining and educational events; make reservations for clubs to host cocktail parties; plan the social and play spaces and the logistics for delivering run materials, food and beverages; assemble run packets with run program book, run pin, run tee-shirt, safe-sex supplies and other sundry items; prepare run awards and plaques; purchase food stuff and beverages not supplied by the caterers; assemble and decorate the social and play space; prepare for the attendees arrivals. (Lenius, 2010, 150)

Once the run has begun, run attendees may attend conference meetings, educational workshops or demonstrations on SM and leathersex topics that are scheduled at the run. Larger leather runs have more functions including complimentary cocktail parties hosted by participating clubs and social organizations. Cocktail parties (also called leather cocktails) are generally hourly events within the run that center on the overall theme of the run event. Awards or trophies are often presented to the club with the best cocktail party. One of the high points of the run is the formal cocktail party where cigars and cordials are often served. It is usually scheduled prior to the formal run
banquet where attendees dress in formal attire wearing their club’s uniform, in full leather clothing or sometimes a dress uniform. Following this, the formal run banquet opens with the presentation or Parade of Club Colors by the participating clubs. During the banquet, speeches are made, new club officers are announced, and awards ceremony may commence. These can also be performed during the final run day’s brunch.

Another run event is the run show, a play or variety show where the attendees are entertained by performances acted out by members of the hosting leather club. The origin of the run show stems from the World War II era when service men would perform campy skits as a form of relief and entertainment while serving out in the field. A good example would be South Pacific with coconut breasts and rag mop wigs on men who have no intention of looking like women (Bean, 1994). The returning veterans introduced drag skits to the run schedule, and this has been incorporated as a part of a run since then. The performances during the show are along the lines of “drag” or campy skit where lip syncing to music is common. Other performances during the show include skits with bikers, cowboys, or military characters acting out comic or erotic fantasy. The scale of the run show mirrors the size of the run in terms of production. Larger venues involve more costumes, professional make-up, planned choreographed dance moves and skilled lip-syncing performances as opposed to smaller ones run shows.

The locations of leather runs vary depending on the type and scale of the run. Some leather runs reserve hotel and banquet spaces while others use campgrounds or large tracts of private property for outdoor runs as a source for the venue. The use of campgrounds dates back to the early days of motorcycle runs where outdoor space was
needed because motorcycle runs provided organized bike events, sometimes called rodeos, as a form of competition. During this event, bikers are challenged through various obstacle courses where riders can test their competitive skills. Another event traditionally held at the run is the enduro. The enduro is a term describing a lengthy course where bikers endure a long and sometimes challenging course.

A third event held at the Run is called the poker run. The poker run is an organized event where participants use their motorbikes to visit five to seven checkpoints, drawing a playing card at each stop. The object is to have the best poker hand at the end of the run. A variation of a poker run is to make the event a scavenger hunt where the location of landmarks or points of interests around town, or the gathering of items at strategic points are used in place of drawing playing cards. Regardless of the type of poker run, the events are sometimes timed, and may involve an entrance fee. The fee is generally a way to raise funds for a charitable cause that can be based on the clubs association with a not-for-profit organization including AIDS research and other worthy causes. Poker runs are not inclusive to the motorcycle run. Many poker runs are performed on weekends throughout the year and sponsored by motorcycle dealers, non-profit organizations and the like; and prizes, plaques, or merchandise donated by commercial sponsors are awarded for the best and worst poker hand or other criteria.

Like their motorcycle counterparts, leather runs also have competitions, poker runs (also called enduro at some leather runs) that are called people games. Similar to their motorcycle run competitions, people games are competitions that are designed by the host club as a way to provide competition among attendees and the clubs they
represent and to earn points on a point system regulated by a governing body. Usually there are three or four games held either at the run hotel or at the host club’s home bar, and the theme or style of the game depends on the overall theme of the leather run. Included in the people games is the enduro. The enduro at leather runs is more often a type of scavenger hunt held near the host club’s home bar, or points located between the host hotel and home bar. The hunt involves finding landmarks or discovering items at various strategic places, and is often the first event that begins the people games. Along with a variation of the enduro event, leather runs sometimes have a poker run. Unlike the former days of traveling to checkpoints, it is usually only a dealer game where the attendee pays a fee to draw cards and the best hand out of all the participants wins.

During the evening hours of the leather run is when the bar crawls are scheduled. Bar crawls center around the host clubs home bar, and provide the opportunity for attendees to visit and support the host club’s home bar, along with other gay and leather bars that are included in the leather run event. It is a form of bar-hopping where attendees and area leatherfolk and other gays and lesbians have a chance to meet, converse and socialize within the confines of the bar space. The ending of the bar crawl coincides with the closing hour of the bar. It is then that the leather run’s afterhours parties are scheduled.

The after hours parties are the final event of each day of the run. Attendees can dress more risqué and can display their fetish-oriented wardrobes during these events. Cocktail parties are usually scheduled during the after hours events, and food is often offered by the host club. The after hours party is also a time where the playroom is open
or becomes most active. Runs provide a play space(s) so sexual and non-sexual SM and leathersex activities can be performed, as well as space for specific demonstrations on various forms of SM, bondage, or other fetish activities. Many leather runs set-up temporary play spaces so attendees who wish to engage in SM, leathersex or other sexual engagements can do so as opposed to performing in an attendee’s hotel room. The play room may not receive as much attention during the day due to the multitude of events scheduled during the leather run.

The leather run attendees bring with them parts, if not all, of their leather dress. The most noted article is the leather club vest or “Colors” as they are often referred to. Visible indicators of Colors or other club-specific clothing are the sew-on patches proclaiming club membership and status or their association to other clubs as associate or honorary membership. Other indicators are the run pins, which are given to run attendees as proof of their participation in the leather run event. In addition, friendship pins are presented or exchanged between members of other clubs to show friendship, brotherhood and camaraderie among leatherfolk.
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

“Work must move away from emphasis on select ‘gay meccas,’ and researchers should be aware that findings are not fully transferable across space, time, gender, lifestyle. The ‘gay community’ must thus be seen in its full diversity, with studies focusing on single groups, or on certain aspects: there are different gay geographies of living, working and relaxing… It is therefore important to conduct any work ‘close’ to the study group, rather than the ‘arm’s length’ approach through purely secondary sources…”

David Bell, Insignificant Others: Lesbian and Gay Geographies.

The use of the term leatherfolk as a label of identity or a descriptive term is related to several interacting dimensions of an individual’s involvement within a subculture (Ponse, 1998). This can include a gay man or lesbian’s second coming out into the leather community (the first is in reference to one’s coming out into the gay community), the extent of his or her integration and involvement in the social and political realms, the level of sexual behavior, or the level of affiliation to the leather or larger gay community. Understanding identity and place involves the concept of these two terms, and the meaning and significance of places and identity for individuals who live in these communities. The methodology used for understanding identity and place primarily involve qualitative techniques, including observation and participatory methods of information gathering. In this study, I will be using these two techniques to achieve
my objectives of discovering how leather runs socially construct a sexual identity. Through this study, I hope to develop an understanding of the performativity of identity and place among leatherfolk.

Because of the many aspects that constitute a leather run, space or leather space has multiple purposes where identities can be performed, and that leather runs have multi-purpose spaces where various activities may occur. The two types of spaces that encompass a run are “social” and “play” spaces. Social spaces are run space areas that constitute a place where introductions and conversation are engaged. Discussions can range from the mundane including cooking recipes and club gossip to more exciting topics like comparing notes about who’s sexy and attractive (hypermasculinity) or which attendee is interested in pursuing leathersex. The social spaces consist of the complimentary cocktail parties, bar crawls, banquets, workshops and demonstrations, people games, and the Anniversary run show. These are the public spaces where constructing a leather identity commences. Unlike social places, play spaces are intimate places where the construction of identity can also occur. These spaces constitute the black room or play room as public space as well as the attendee’s own hotel room, which I consider private or at least semi-public spaces. For the purpose of this study, my concentration on the objectives of facilitating the construction of sexual identities will be centered on the social spaces of the leather run. The play spaces will be described to provide a better understanding of the entire leather run event.

During my research into leatherfolk, identity and place, I explored a leather run and its role in constructing a sexual identity, and examined run events where participants
attended to promote and achieve their status as leatherfolk. Using the leather run held annually in Nashville, Tennessee, I observed and participated in this event to see how this venue constructed sexual identity among leatherfolk.

There are many reasons why people choose to attend and participate in runs. The distance in traveling usually poses no barrier outside of the economic implications. Attendees travel to leather runs regardless of their place of origin—which can be local, regional or from outside the state. The barrier to entry would be in the form of cost for transportation (usually by air) and for the run fee itself, which for this particular event, the run fee was $205.00 including the hotel room and all food provided.

Some of my thoughts while researching the leather run include; does a run enable the performance of identities among attendees? During the course of a run, is the performance of sexuality discussed within the context of construction of leather identities? How is space divided, organized, and produced during runs? These questions are addressed to help explain the reason for the formation of one’s sexual identity among leatherfolk.

The importance of this study is to further the research into an area that has been looked at, but rarely studied in terms of space. There have been challenges in academia to the research on gays and lesbians in general, and leatherfolk and leather communities specifically. These challenges include gate keepers and moralists who restrict or deny a researcher access. There is also the lack of opportunity itself where researchers may not be aware or familiar with the leather run as an institution within the leather subculture. Many leather runs are not publicly advertised outside gay or leather venues and
establishments. Advertising outside the gay communities would not be beneficial in terms of increased attendance. Another reason is the possibility of protest and disturbance, though I have not witness or experienced any disruptions at the few leather runs that I have attended in the past. In summary, it is my hope that this study will contribute to the continual research and contributions on leatherfolk, the leather subculture within a larger gay community, and the study of the leather interactions within leather run spaces.

The Approach

To study how leather runs socially construct a sexual identity, I utilized the observation-and-participation methodology. This fieldwork technique, which is widely used as a methodology in cultural anthropology, sociology and other social sciences, attempts to gain and describe in detail the social systems and culture of a group or community. These two methods involved me observing and participating in various leather run events and witnessing the events as they unfolded throughout the leather run weekend. The observation of the leather run will be uncontrolled in that it will not be hindered or restricted by noise or disruptions while noting phenomena that may occur during the leather run (Hay, 2005).

The advantage of the observation and participatory technique as a research method is its ability to be comprehensive. The overall concept is to see leather run attendees in action as events unfold, in a manner similar to an anthropologist out in the field observing phenomena. This empirical methodology is useful for understanding the nature of leatherfolk and the analysis of their experiences as they occur in one of their
leather environments. Using this type of fieldwork allowed me to witness a large number of leatherfolk interacting within the run environment, in this case, the space that the leather run occupies. As a run participant, my access to witness and observe was unrestricted in each of the social run spaces at the hotel, or at the participating gay bars. I was able to communicate and interact while in appropriate leather dress, and was able to partake in all of the run events that were scheduled. As a researcher, I was able to see how the interactions among the leather run attendees unfolded within the leather run space.

The importance of witnessing the performativity of sexual identity in run attendees is that leather is self-representation. Leatherfolk embellish themselves with semiotic constructions of masculinity that are conceptually rich with symbolism. In the leatherfolk culture, “symbols of leather accentuate hypermasculine forms of sexuality. Masculine features, such as large muscles and male genitals, often are emphasized and eroticized through black leather” (Mosher, 2006, 97). Black leather dress is intricately linked to masculinity patterns and symbols of power throughout the leather run. Black leather is a marker for sexual identity among leatherfolk and the function of their black leather dress is similar to uniforms (military, police…) in that it has a certain affectionate place in gay and leather cultures as emblems or symbols of power, sexuality and masculinity. The eroticization of black leather perpetuates their leather identity to their gender and sexual identities. Together, they form a leather social network (leather community) and the practicing of SM and leathersex.
The visual dimension of the social construction and display of identity through masculine symbols is easier to capture through observation and participatory methods over other forms of qualitative methods. Observing and participating not only allows the representation of the social performativity of sexual identity to transpire, but also allows the narratives of it through interactions to occur simultaneously. The freedom to be able to express one’s sexuality, or to be oneself at the leather run is a motivation factor towards particular forms of engagement, be it social, physical or sexual in nature. The place which is set up as a leather space (leather run), occupied by individuals who display their leather symbolism and semiotics while interacting with other leatherfolk (attendees) provide the ingredients for the construction of one’s sexual identity. This is reflected in the post-run analysis that constitutes identity and performativity as process at the leather run. In this case the Track XXIII leather run produced by the Conductors L/L of Nashville, Tennessee entitled Star Track.

Conductors L/L’s Anniversary Run

The leather run chosen for this study is an annual event produced by the leather club called the Conductors L/L (Levi/Leather) of Nashville, Tennessee. In their club name, the L/L stands for Levi/Leather, even though L/L is commonly referred to as Leather/Levi in the leather community. The Conductors is one of the longest surviving gay social and service groups in Nashville. Their annual Conductors’ run Track XXIII, entitled “Star Track” was chosen for this study. It was held on the weekend of March 18-20, 2005 at the Days Inn at the Coliseum hotel in downtown Nashville.
There are a couple of reasons why I chose this particular leather run as opposed to other leather run events. The first is the popularity of the Track runs. The Conductors are known in many leather communities regionally and nationally. This is helped by their philanthropic and humanitarian activities and their high visibility in their communities and the State of Tennessee. The popularity of the Track runs is a second reason for choosing it for this study. Having the pleasure of attending Conductors’ runs prior to this study, I noticed many of the same leatherfolk attending Track runs year after year. The surprising aspect of the repeat visits is that they in turn introduce other leatherfolk who may become repeat attendees as well. The popularity may be helped by the Club’s membership in the Mid-American Conference of Clubs, along with its association with Southeastern leather clubs who are members of the Southeast Conference of Clubs. Lastly, this particular leather run is held in a centrally located place in the United States. Track run attendees travel from many parts of the United States with the majority of them originating from the Southern region (including Texas) and the South Atlantic States, and from the Midwest and Great Lakes regions. In addition, I have met a handful of Track run attendees who travel from the Mid-Atlantic, New England and the Pacific Northwest regions of the U.S. There are other leather runs that are also known and well attended, but the central location was the deciding factor for choosing Track XXIII.

The objective of this study is the observation of Track XXIII by attending and documenting the events in the social settings that constitute this leather run. Using this methodology will allow me to witness the leather dress of the attendees, their behavior
patterns, and their body language as they interact in this temporal leatherspace throughout the run event. Throughout Track XXIII, I will be observing the run events that are scheduled and document the results from my findings. My participation in this run will allow me to immerse myself in the run spaces, converse and interact with run attendees, and engage myself in the run events including the banquets, bar crawls, cocktail parties, the people games and the Anniversary run show. I felt this approach provided me with the understanding of the performance of sexual identity in Track XXIII run spaces, and provided me the opportunity to immerse myself in the settings that constitute this leather run with little interference. The observance and participating in this leather run was utilized to describe the leather spaces where the Track XXIII took place and document the unstructured social interactions that occur during the run event. Though the arrangement of space varies between leather runs hosted by different leather clubs, the overall usage and format remains similar.

The method of observation and participation is appropriate for this study. Here, full participation is possible because of my own sexual orientation as a gay male and an active leatherfolk. Within the confines of this run, I attended the hourly complimentary cocktail parties, the people games, the luncheons and formal banquets, and the Anniversary run show. My engagement in this run was simplified because of my familiarity with SM and leathersex, the leather culture, and the leather community, and my engagement in the leather community is above the traditional modes of exposure. I have been an active participant in various levels of the leather community, and I am a member of a leather/levi club that engages in social events typical of leather clubs
including the Conductors. As an active member, I am able to wear the leather dress as a leatherman, and am familiar with the cultural leather symbols, the vocabulary, and the leather dress code of the leather community.

As part of the leather community, the advantages of networking come into play to which provided me with contacts. This leads to an easier way in completing the application process and being accepted as an attendee. In addition, I have the appropriate leather dress that enabled me to blend in with other participants during the run events. This benefit will allow me to immerse myself in various run settings and social spaces.

The disadvantages of using this methodology for collecting information are two-fold. The first drawback is personal, which involves my own bias and perceptions. The bias comes into play because of my own involvement in the leather community. For my perceptions, I may be searching for, or seeing things or events that I want to see as opposed to what actually transpired. I should not expect run attendees to arrive wearing complete black leather dress, including leather chaps and pants, leather shirts and a variety of leather boots, specifically paratrooper and engineer boots. Proper wardrobe is desired during the leather run but attendees are only required to wear the minimum level of leather clothing while a run is in progress. These include black or cowboy boots (no tennis shoes), denim jeans (minus any undergarments, though some runs will accept jock-straps) which may include a black leather belt, and plain or leather oriented tee-shirts (traditionally black), along with a black leather bar or club vest. This can be worn with or without a tee-shirt underneath. These articles may be acquired with little investment by the attendee.
For the events, my perception should not be narrow in scale that I lose sight of the overall observation when the leather run is a multi-faceted event where not all attendees will participate in all the activities that are scheduled. Some attendees may forgo attending the bar crawls or other run events. They may prefer to engage or hook-up with other attendee(s) for physical or sexual reasons in the privacy of their hotel rooms.

The second disadvantage of using this methodology for collecting information is practicality. Performing interviews and the difficulties of surveying run attendees with questionnaires and interacting with them or other attendees simultaneously can become daunting. This can be compounded because I cannot observe two locations simultaneously due to the multiple events that occur during a run. The leather run events are held in multiple spaces, and events like the bar crawl, where the Conductor’s home bar (the Chute Complex), along with two other homosexual bars (the Blu Bar and Nightclub, and Georges Pub) that are part of this leather run, will be scheduled simultaneously. Therefore, the possibility of missing an element at one function while observing another is very real.

Other forms of methodology that could have been used in this study include individual and group interviews and questionnaires. These two methodologies may provide the depth or scope, and valuable insights, but the passiveness of a “sit-down” question-and-answer session would not provide the characteristics that make the leather space unique and leather runs dynamic. In addition, the disadvantage of low return rates is typical of most questionnaire surveys, and the information provided by respondents will not further the scope of my objectives. In either case, these methodologies would
have removed the subject and the researcher from the run spaces and temporal leather environments, causing reliance on accounts of interaction rather than on first hand observations.

While using this methodology, I was able to observe the activities and engage myself in the leather run spaces. This included the interaction with the attendees, and participation in conversations and discourse during the Track XXIII run events. This interaction was helped by me being a gay male who is a member of the leather community, and is a regular participant in leather runs, including the Conductors’ Anniversary runs.

The benefits that I gained while performing this study may be more difficult for researchers who are not familiar with the leather community. They may have difficulty in finding information on leather runs and may need to rely on networking to gain access. This will involve the building of a rapport and establishing trust, and learning about the leather culture and its symbolisms. Ethical issues may rise to those who are not involved or not familiar with the leather community, and their views may differ from those attending the leather run. This will include the sexual recreation that occurs, specifically during the after hours parties, where it may be difficult to comprehend in a society that is generally conservative on morality and open sexuality. A researcher who gains access and enters the run environment ill-prepared may taint the run space.

There is a possibility of the researcher’s attitude or behavior affecting the run attendees, which in turn may interfere with the collection and quality of information gathered. They may be greeted with suspicion, and may find it difficult in building
alliances or gaining run attendee’s confidence so to gather data. Getting attendees to be themselves and act comfortable in a leather run environment could also be difficult when run attendees are aware of the presence of a researcher, and may be apprehensive in conversing with them. This may be compounded if the researcher were a female attending a primarily male-dominated event. People act or perform differently when an outside presence is seen or felt. All these can affect the relationship and trust formed between the researcher and run attendees, and the outcomes observed (Hay, 2005). It is my thought that most leatherfolk, like their gay counterparts, would accept a researcher’s presence at this particular run, but their actions and body language may still interfere with the results nonetheless. In the following chapter, the results of this study and the performativity analysis using the observation and participatory methodology at Track XXIII are discussed.
“Leather—I put it on and I feel like a different person. You know a different side of me comes out... Much more open and honest, well, I’m honest, really honest if I want to get into BDSM stuff, ‘cause you gotta be. But I just, I feel more whole when I’m wearing leather, when I’m in a leather scene. ‘Cause I’m not hiding anything and [pause] I like men, So men in leather just is really—a turn-on.”

Adam, interview with Peter Hennen, Faeries, Bears, and Leathermen: Men in Community Queering the Masculine.

A Second Coming Out

To enter into the leather community, gay males and lesbians perform a second “coming out.” Unlike a gay individual’s first coming out where personal discovery and acceptance of one’s nature is experienced, coming out into the leather world involves the confrontation with the elements of social taboo, power and instinct, and the crossing of the borders of sexual frontier and sexuality (Mains, 1984). Many leatherfolk mark their passage into the leather with their first physical leathersex or SM experience, receiving their first leather jacket, or being accepted into a leather club.

However the experience and the processes assist people’s performativity in shaping their leatherfolk identity, and in turn become a part of a leather community. The initial attraction to black leather or the stimulus that caught their attention towards it may
have been the visual symbols of leather iconography. Examples can include viewing imagery of black leather dress men in periodicals, seeing leatherfolk in public or at a leather club event or bar night, or knowing or associating with people in the leather community. Whatever the case may be, they have discovered the leather community, a subculture within the larger gay realm that they wish to explore further. It is at this point where they begin their journey into the leather world where they search for, and discover ways in which they can learn about leather and how to approach it. Through their leather quests, they discover road maps and directions that can lead them to their leather endeavors along with untold experiences. During their travels they learn more about leather iconography, semiotics and symbolisms, and may experience new and exciting things. They eventually discover ways to engage in leather spaces and places where they can seek out, socialize and converse with other leatherfolk. Through the process of their second coming out, the social construction of their sexual and leather identities begins.

On the leather road map, a leather novice can find a venue, a place where others of the leather community congregate. One of those venues may be a local gay retailer that caters to the leather community by supply leather clothing and accessories. Inside the establishment is a space full of leather dress, where racks of black leather articles line the store walls, and books, periodicals and leather sundries, along with leathersex products and equipment filled the retail shelves and backrooms.

In addition to a retailer, a second venue where one may find an entry into the leather community is the local gay or leather bar. Similar to the retail shop, the gay bar can be specifically leather in format, or may allocate space adjacent to the gay area of the
bar. Gay bars that are not leather-oriented may play host to leather-themed nights to increase customer traffic from both leather and non-leatherfolk, or may be the “home” bar for a leather club. The leather space inside the bar, whether it is temporary for a themed night or permanent for a home bar, may be decorated with leather imagery and symbols of leatherfolk, BD and SM, and masculinity along the wall while leather club colors and insignias may also be displayed. Alongside the leather décor there may be motorcycle parts hung on the walls or from the ceiling to remind patrons of the masculine space they occupy.

These leather symbols are all visual attributes used to enhance the leather space, help establish the leather environment within, and to confirm the bar patrons where they are. As with the retailer, the level of intimidation at a leather bar can be striking as in the case below:

I remember the first day I walked into the New York Eagle… I had never been into a leather bar before and I was absolutely petrified… I had no idea what I was going to find… But the day I first got involved in the leather community, the feeling was very different (than the gay community). I found that people were a lot more accepting, a lot more down to earth, and, in general, a lot more welcoming. (Mel Jacobs, interview with Randy Shulman, Metro Weekly Magazine, 2006)

There have been references in leather literature of individuals (myself included) arriving and quickly leaving these intimidating spaces. But regardless of the intimidation received, the difficulties in finding these venues vary by location. In urban areas, it is not difficult to locate gay and lesbian retailers, bookstores, leathersex specialty shops and bathhouses. If a retailer is not a full-service leather store, they may have space allocated for leather clothing and products similar to gay bars with leather spaces. Those in smaller
urban or in suburban and rural areas may need to travel to larger metropolitan centers to visit these venues, and the leather community as a whole.

One way a person can overcome the barrier of traveling and distance is through the internet. Since the introduction of the World Wide Web (www), the amount of information pertaining to leather, leathersex and the leather community since the mid-1990s has been considerable. People can access vast amounts of information by utilizing search engines to discover a wide range of resources and services on the history and literature of the leather culture and leather community, leathersex in various media, as well as leather clubs, leather events, gay and leather bars and retail establishments. The leather discourse is also immense when one factors in the large number of websites and web blogs that cater to, and engage in discourse about leather.

The curious person who enters these physical or virtual leather spaces may have needed to bolster some courage, but once inside, he or she will notice on display the many iconic symbols and traits that represent leatherfolk dress, or may see them shopping or drinking at the gay retailer or bar establishments. While browsing, he or she may notice a leather run advertisement or a reference to the event in the local gay newspapers, or may find information on leather runs from a leather club’s website. Regardless of where people find their information about the leather run, they will discover that this is one of the roads they can travel down to discover leather.

Leather runs are one of a number of institutions where a person can find other individuals who have similar leather interests. He or she will learn that this particular venue is a place where gay men and, to a lesser extent lesbians and their heterosexual
counterparts, can shed their daily wear and dress themselves in their black leather uniform. They will discover that a leather run is where masculine and sexual identities are cultivated and fostered. It is this thought that led to the purpose of this study, to understand how leather runs facilitate the construction of sexual identities among leatherfolk.

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this study was to examine how leather runs facilitate the social construction of sexual identities among leatherfolk at a leather run. Within the leather run examination, I wish to develop an understanding of identity performativity and place among leatherfolk. Here I will discuss how the leather space is divided and organized so as to understand the concept of place when I address questions about the run attendees identify themselves as leatherfolk, or if the run space enables the performativity of sexual identity. This study will focus on the organization of the leather run space, which provides the stage for the performance of sexual identity. Using Judith Butler’s concepts of performativity, I will discuss how sexual identities are socially constructed.

Performing a Second Coming Out

Judith Butler’s publications on the performativity as it relates to lesbians are central to this study. Her works distinguish performativity from performance, and that the act of coming out is where the performance most certainly requires an audience of some sort, and that the performative act can happen when no one else is around. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler references that the performative is not primarily theatrical, and that it is theatricality produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated
(and conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity) (Butler, 1993).

In Butler’s performative act, the first step in the formation of a leather identity is to announce one’s sexual identity, the second coming out. Their first coming out experience was as a gay man. A side note, the average age an individual who comes out as gay and as a leather person is 24 and 32 years old respectively (Mosher, 2006, 117). The second coming out begins the process by which an individual interprets black leather, masculine symbolisms and semiotics, and the understanding of the stylistic cues and meaning of what leather is and what it means. Leather symbolizes masculinity and power to leatherfolk. Their leather dress, leather protocols for interactions, and their eroticization for SM and leathersex gives leatherfolk a way to be “recognized and enjoy their masculinity and sexual orientation in the company of other masculine men” (Mosher, 2006).

The second coming out process also includes the understanding of the specific characteristics that form the leather environment, its identity as a community, and why it is unique as a subculture. Leatherfolk’s masculine identity is constructed and maintained socially, primarily through small social interactions facilitated primarily by leather clubs and bars within the leather community (Hennen, 2008). Leather runs are an extension of this community though it is frequented by a small portion of that population. Regardless, it serves as a place where the construction of the leather identity can be performed.

Though there are other avenues where a person can experience a second coming out, whether it is at a leather club or a gay bar, a bathhouse or leathersex event, leather
runs offer gays and, to a lesser extent lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered and heterosexual individuals a place to experience this second coming out. Lesbians generally do not participate in leather runs hosted by male dominated leather clubs, or leather runs that are not centered on pansexuality. During my participation at Track XXIII, I met six lesbian women who traveled from Chicago, Des Moines and New Orleans to attend. One of the women from Chicago was a non-white attendee. For the majority of this and other leather runs, the attendance is predominantly a gay white male phenomenon.

In this chapter, I will examine this phenomenon at Track XXIII with a particular observation on the interactions of the attendees present during the weekend-long event. The hotel and host bars served as spaces for dialogue among the leatherfolk attending and guests. In this analysis, I felt that this leather run had an impact on a broader scale and provided an inclusive space for the construction of sexual identity. The detailed description of this leather run is listed below.

Track XXIII

The Conductors’ L/L annual Anniversary runs are traditionally held in the third weekend of March. Each year the club members celebrate their Anniversary by producing and performing an annual leather run event. The overall theme of the club and the Anniversary run generally revolves around trains and rail transportation (though there is a lightening bolt in their club logo), and their Anniversary runs are referred to as “Tracks.” The first Anniversary run entitled “Track I” was held on March 12-14, 1982, and Track XXIII entitled Star Track to which I attended for this study was held on March 18-20, 2005. In the 23 years since Track I, the Anniversary run has maintained the same
overall format and schedule of events including a run variety show for entertainment, people games, breakfasts and luncheons, hourly complimentary cocktail parties, the formal cocktail party and the Parade of Colors, both held prior to the formal banquet, and the Sunday brunch. (See Appendix for schedule of events) In addition, Track XXIII hosted a post-run party at the Chute Complex. A post-run event is common with leather runs and is traditionally held at the club’s home bar once the leather run has ended.

Track XXIII spanned the entire weekend and was attended by 135 leather men and six women representing thirty-eight organizations who traveled from many parts of the United States. (See Appendix for listing of participating clubs) One of the awards presented during the awards presentations is to the run attendee who traveled the furthest to Track XXIII. The recipient of this award was an attendee from Seattle, Washington. The overall leather run attendance increased to over one hundred and fifty five people when club members and Conductors’ alumni who are also attending are factored into the total count. Participation by alumni and special guests varies each year depending on the amount of extra work needed prior to and during the leather run. This also includes people outside the leather community who volunteer their time to help the Conductors with the leather run event. Some of the volunteers included make-up artists, costume designers and drag queen performers before and during the Anniversary run show. Though Track XXIII is a closed venue, the Anniversary run show is open to the general public. Those people who came to the run show included representatives from the Vanderbilt University Medical Center, the Comprehensive Care Center and from the Out and About Nashville, Inc. (publisher of Out and About Newspaper).
Track XXIII was a large event that required five separate public spaces where the identity construction was performed. Three of the five spaces comprise of gay bars that played host to the leather run event. They included: The Chute Complex, Georges Pub, and the Blu Bar and Nightclub. Because these leather run spaces are located in different areas of Nashville, the Conductors offered shuttle services between the hotel and the participating bars. The shuttle bus operated during the run events schedule and generally ran in 20 minute intervals. The shuttle schedule for all three days is printed in the Run program booklet listed in the Appendix.

The first of the three bar spaces is called The Chute Complex, which is commonly referred to as the Chute. It is a multiple bar complex located at 2535 Franklin Road in the Melrose area of East Nashville. I would like to note that as of 2007, the Chute closed its doors, and to this date there has been no other establishment occupying the space. The Chute played a dominant role by allocating leather run space to a number of run events scheduled. Georges Pub and Blu also played a role during Friday and Saturday nights respectively, but their space contribution was limited in terms of performativity. Though I visited these two venues for a short period of time, I felt that not many Track XXIII attendees visited them. My thought is that Georges Pub was limited in terms of scale by its size, and Blu in terms of its scope because of its clientele, who are generally not leatherfolk. Their description follows my observation of the Chute Complex listed below.

The fourth and fifth spaces are within the leather run hotel structure. The Days Inn at the Coliseum is located at 211 North First Street off of Interstate 24 (I-24). The
hotel is a 180 guest room hotel overlooking the East Bank Stadium, also called the Coliseum (currently called the LP Field) and the downtown Nashville landscape. In addition to the run attendee’s rooms as private spaces, the public run spaces are located in the large banquet hall and ninth floor hospitality suite. My description of the Days Inn is listed below following the participating bars.

Participating Gay Bars

The Chute Complex is a six-bar complex that serves both the gay and leather communities. Each of the bars are designed and decorated in different themes. The room that constitutes the leather space serves as the Conductors’ L/L home bar. The Chute also provides space for two other gay organizations: the Smokey Mountain Rodeo Association (SMRA) and the Music City Bears. Based on the Chute’s interior and exterior design, I am speculating that that the structure may have been a free-standing retail establishment with an attached two-floor parking deck. The front half of building is a two story structure while the rear half is only a single level. The Chute is located on a busy retail and commercial street with the main entrance located on the side of the structure on the opposite side of the parking deck. During the leather run bar crawl, events are scheduled on both Friday and Saturday nights while the Chute is open to the general public. Normally it is closed during the day, but the owners of the bar provide space for the run’s Saturday luncheon, people games competitions and the Anniversary run show, along with the Sunday’s post-run party entitled “First Ladies Tea” party.

The following paragraphs are detailed descriptions of the Chute Complex starting from the main entrance and foyer space. A side note about the Chute bars is that each
space has a restroom. The restrooms, designated as male only may indicate the male only gay clientele who frequent that particular space, as opposed to spaces with both male and female restrooms, which are more likely to be frequented by women as well. Below is a diagram of the Chute Complex. The entrance to the Chute is indicated by the black arrow on the left side of the diagram, with the balance of the black arrows indicating the flow of traffic inside the complex. Bar patrons who wish to go to the Rainbow Room show bar, the Nashville Eagle leather bar, or the outside patio and courtyard area must travel through the Country Roundup bar (See Figure 1).

When the bar patrons first enter the Chute, they enter into the foyer space where bar attendants sit or stand behind a glass display case checking patron’s identifications. Once past the desk, patrons can walk to the left and enter the bar space called “Neon’s,” which is followed by the dance bar called “The Sanctuary.” It is in these two spaces where the Saturday afternoon luncheon is served prior to the Anniversary run show.

Neon’s bar is located between the first restroom (male only) and small kitchen area along the west wall. A phone and ATM machine are located in opposite corners of this space. The larger Sanctuary space consists of a nearly square-shaped bar located off-center of the space bordering the *HI-NRGY* dance floor and a raised stage area. Two pool tables and a second restroom (male only) are located to the south of the center bar. Double doors on the east wall lead to the rest of the Chute Complex.
Figure 1: The Chute Complex Floor Plan
During Track XXIII’s bar crawl on both Friday and Saturday nights, the experience inside Neon and the Sanctuary can be viewed as an entertainment venue similar to a discothèque. The space consisted of windowless walls painted black, with dance music supplied by a disc jockey or DJ booth and flashing lights over the dance floor and crowd noise generated throughout. During both evenings, the space was occupied by the traditional nightclub dance crowd dressed in marginal to fashionable dress. The general gay population was probably aware of the Conductors’ bar crawls being held at the Chute. I noticed that there were patrons in some form of leather dress who were not Track XXIII attendees.

Though the discothèque atmosphere techno throb music may be popular to those bar patrons who were present both evenings, Neon and the Sanctuary was a transcending space to the run attendees. I call this space transcending because it was not the final destination for the attendees who came to the Chute. The level of masculinity and representation of power from the patrons occupying these two spaces were lacking, though the bartenders that I observed were dressed more appropriately for leatherfolk. Overall, the Track XXIII attendees who passed through were searching for a stimulating atmosphere of leather that these two spaces lacked. Simply stated, they transcended to the next bar space.

The third space, called the “Country Roundup” bar, is located through a set of double doors separating it from the Sanctuary. This space is the center of the complex that serves as a crossroads to the majority of the Chute’s spaces. This elongated space is decorated in a country-western theme (with country music playing) with a long bar
running along the west wall ending near a third (both male and female) restroom. The Roundup dance floor occupies the north end of the space immediately to the left of the double doors. An entrance to an outdoor patio space called the Falls Patio and Courtyard is located on the south wall at the opposite end of the dance floor. The Patio’s name refers to a manmade waterfall built along the natural rock wall that serves as a natural wall and boundary. The Roundup serves as the place where the afternoon complimentary cocktail party is served during the afternoon luncheon, and the Falls Patio space serves as one of the spaces where some of the people games were held.

The western décor within this space is fitting due to Nashville being a metonym for the country music industry. The American West and the cowboy genre are icons of masculinity. The long history of the West in popular culture has produced imagery of cowboys as tough, disciplined and independent, traits that mirror those of leatherfolk. The difference between the two is their second skin. The leather identity is replaced with the masculine image of the Marlboro Man with its cowboy and Western dress.

Though the Neon and the Sanctuary were busy with bar patrons, the Roundup space was continuously occupied by Track XXIII attendees during the afternoon and evening run events. The atmosphere did not have a strong feeling of leather, but the masculine symbolism portrayed by the décor and the aura of the West, and the run attendees in their leather dress made this space inclusive. The inclusiveness of Roundup’s space is that the congregation of bar patrons, many in cowboy dress, and run attendees dressed in black leather, and all of the others in between was comprehensive, and the atmosphere had an equal without exception sense to the space.
On the east wall near the Roundup dance floor is the entrance to the “The Rainbow Room Show Bar.” The Rainbow Room is arranged similar to a cabaret bar where live entertainment is performed with the audience sitting at tables as opposed to rows of seats like a traditional theater. This space is where regularly scheduled “drag shows” are held, and where the Conductors’ Track XXIII Anniversary run show was performed. The space inside constitutes a raised stage area with a catwalk located on the north wall. I am guessing that the area can accommodate fifty or more people sitting at the tables and at the bar, and one hundred and fifty or more for standing room only including along the west and south walls. The Rainbow’s bar is located on the east wall and the sound and lighting booth for the stage is on the south wall between the entrance door and the fourth (both male and female) restrooms.

As opposed to the previous three bar spaces, the Rainbow Room, with its “drag” show performances, is an effeminate or feminized performing space. This is reinforced by the lack of décor within this bar with the exception of the pinkish-red lights hanging from the ceiling that illuminated the seating area. Instead of décor and atmosphere dictating the space, the Rainbow Room is an effeminate place due to the performativity of the drag show performers. Drag shows refers to men dressed in a female gender role who dance, act and perform on stage (most often to music by popular female vocal artists) in the dress and mannerisms of women. Their dress and mannerism, with their exaggerated style of dress and characteristics (such as make-up and eyelashes) are generally used for comic, dramatic or satirical effect. This effeminate role counters the masculinity and power represented by leather dress, yet the tradition of men dressed in
“drag” for entertainment purposes stems from the days of World War II. The Rainbow Room doors open at 7:00 p.m. and performances began at 9:00 p.m. Normally there is no cover charge to enter this space, but entrance fees or donations have been accepted during special fund-raising events.

The last two rooms constitute the Chute’s Nashville Eagle bar. These two not-for-the-faint-of-hearts (as one run attendee described it) leather spaces serve as the leather bar, and are entered through a set of double doors from the Roundup bar. The first of the two rooms serves more as a transitional space where the leather décor is sparse. I label this transitional because there is a lack of furniture with the exception of the boot black chair located on the south wall. There is a shelf along the north wall where one can place drinks, but overall, this is a standing room only space. It is also the space where the “Boot Black” boot shiner performs his services. A boot black is a leather terminology describing a person who cleans and polishes leatherfolk footwear as a form of fetish. It is important to note that all proceeds from tips earned from the boot black, and from money donated during the Anniversary run show are donated to the Conductors’ charities.

Located at the east wall is the Conductors’ trophy case displaying awards, trophies and other memorabilia the club received from attending other leather runs, and from local and regional gay social events. Located between the entrances on the north wall is a fifth (male only) restroom, and a second entrance to the Falls Patio and Courtyard is located next to the trophy case.

The second of the two rooms that makes up the Nashville Eagle is the leather bar space. The furniture includes tables and chairs, and a third pool table, and a built-in
seating bench along the walls runs the perimeter of the room except for the north wall where the bar and a sixth (male only) restroom are located. The space is heavily decorated in leather symbolism. Hanging on display on the west wall are various Club Colors. Over the years, these Colors were presented to the Conductors as a sign of friendship and brotherhood. Some of the Saturday afternoon people games and the Friday and Saturday night complimentary cocktail parties were held in this space. It is also the space where much of the leatherfolk congregate during both evening bar crawl event. It is within these two bar spaces that the sense of place for the run attendees and the stimulating atmosphere of masculinity were felt the most.

Though the accessibility to the Eagle is through the previously mentioned bars, its clarity on what this space constitutes was well represented. The experience of leather was most prominent in what I call transportive space. I designated this space as transportive because I felt Track XXIII attendees were sensing the uplifting and enhanced masculine leather space. This was the result of run attendees and bar patrons displaying their black leather symbolism, and emitting their sense of power and masculinity. The leather experience and leather environment present in this space made the Nashville Eagle bar the most prominent place where sexual identity was performed.

The last room which is located immediately to the right from the main entrance foyer is the Chute Complex’s “piano bar” called the Silver Stirrup. It comprises of a small bar, a piano and the seventh restroom (both male and female) in the southern part of the space. The layout of furniture and décor resembles a coffee house. Along with tables and chairs, there is a sitting area with sofas and a fireplace that add to the intimate
space where people can escape the loud and at times crowded areas of the Chute Complex. Adjacent to the bar is a small space where a fourth pool table is located. This is the only bar that has its own separate entrance from the outside, and the only space not utilized for Track XXIII events.

The Silver Stirrup is the only part of the Chute that is open daily. The rest of the complex is only open in the evenings between Thursdays through Sundays. In addition to the Chute Complex as a Track XXIII venue, Georges Pub and Blu Bar and Nightclub were also part of the bar crawl scheduled. Georges Pub, located at 1501 Second Avenue South in Nashville, was scheduled for the Friday night bar crawl. The Pub is a small bar with an outdoor patio along the front façade of the free standing structure. The bar itself is centrally positioned along the back wall with table and chairs arranged around, and bar stools at the bar. The Pub is also located on a busy street, but in a location removed from the gay enclave of Church Street. Employees from the bar hosted the opening complimentary cocktail party at the Days Inn’s Hospitality Suite as opposed to holding it at the bar itself later in the evening. I was unable to discover why The Pub did not host the cocktail party at the establishment, but I sense that the size and square footage of the bar prohibited it. As with the Chute’s Roundup bar, the run space at Georges Pub had a sense of inclusiveness because of the regular bar patrons mixing and mingling with Track XXIII attendees, though this sense would be temporal.

Blu Bar and Nightclub, located on 1713 Church Street, was scheduled for the Saturday night bar crawl. Blu (since 2008, Blu has changed its name to Vibe) is located in Nashville’s West End neighborhood where the bustling Church Street area of gay bars
and businesses are located. Church Street is the center of Nashville’s gay district with a host of establishments that cater to the gay community. Blu Bar and Nightclub is one of the city’s gay dance venues and is located between retail establishments in a strip mall structure. Inside the bar, the dance floor is positioned in the center of the bar space surrounded by tables and chairs. The two bars serve the bar patrons: an elongated bar is located opposite the dance floor, and a smaller bar is located near the hallway that leads to the public restrooms in the rear. Blu played host to one complimentary cocktail party sponsored by the Smokey Mountain Rodeo Association located near the rear bar. Blu’s space resembled the Chute’s Neon and the Sanctuary bar space, and the nightclub characteristics were similar with painted black walls, techno throb dance music and DJ booth, flashing lights over the dance floor and crowd noise generated throughout the place. The crowd inside Blu was heavy, and the dance floor was busy between ‘drag’ performances that were occurring throughout the evening. In general, it was a crowded space for constructing a sexual identity. From here I will discuss the two leather run spaces located at the Days Inn at the Coliseum.

Days Inn at the Coliseum

The other two locales where sexual identities were performed were located at the Days Inn at the Coliseum. The Days Inn is a moderate sized hotel that played host to Track XXIII. The hotel rooms were included in the run fee though staying there was voluntary. Attendees can find other lodgings, but the leather run experience would be diminished if people are not present throughout the run event weekend. The two large spaces that Track XXIII occupies were the 4,000 square foot “Cumberland” banquet
room (named after the Cumberland River that flows through Nashville) located on the first floor, and the 3,367 square foot “Skyview” room or Hospitality room located on the ninth floor. Each room can accommodate two hundred and fifty to three hundred and one hundred fifty to two hundred people respectively.

Track XXIII utilized the Cumberland room for the Anniversary banquet and the presentation of club colors or “Parade of Colors” on Saturday evening, and for the Breakfast Buffet and the Anniversary run awards presentation on Sunday morning. This space constitutes the some of the direct and casual socializing and camaraderie between run attendees. The dichotomy of these two events is that during the Anniversary banquet, the attendees were wearing their represented club uniforms or their finer leather dress, while during the Breakfast Buffet, attendees were wearing casual leather attire including attendee’s club vests. At other leather runs I saw run attendees wearing military uniforms, but for Track XXIII, I only witnessed one person, who was wearing an army dress uniform during the Anniversary banquet.

The arrangement of the Sky View room (Hospitality Suite) is an open space where three of the four walls consist of mostly glass windows overlooking the downtown Nashville landscape. Entering through double doors off the elevator foyer, run attendees entered a transportive space where the leather experience is unique. Though I label the Sky View room and the Nashville Eagle bar transportive, they differ in that the Sky View is a temporal place that manifested into a masculine space that was occupied by leatherfolk dressed in various styles of leather. The access to leather and the stimulating atmosphere of masculinity created by the run attendees in their leather dress, and the
general feel and comfort level made this space transportive to the performance of sexual identity. The Nashville Eagle on the other hand is a permanent space of masculinity where the décor and leather atmosphere is stationary.

Once the Track XXIII attendees entered the Sky View leather space, they could walk to the right or left. To the right is a small space with one wall consisting of glass. This space was occupied by a leather retail shop temporarily assembled by a North Carolina vendor. To the left was a larger space containing the majority of the Sky View space. Once inside, the room becomes light and spatial, help by the nearly all glass walls. The only obstruction of the Nashville skyline is the temporary “black room” or play space that had been constructed in the far left corner using heavy black plastic to construct walls. The far right corner is reserved space for the complimentary cocktail party tables. The Track XXIII events held within this larger space included the following: run registration, a barbecue called “Vittles,” complimentary cocktail parties and an after hours party after the bar crawl on Friday night; The Saturday morning breakfast and cocktail parties, the main cocktail party with cordials prior to the Anniversary banquet and the after hours party after the Saturday night bar crawl; and the Sunday morning breakfast and cocktail parties prior to the Sunday brunch and awards presentation.

Leather Run Identities

The leather run spaces and the social interactions at the Days Inn are independent spaces free of distractions from outside interference by people not associated with the run or the gay and leather communities. At the Chute Complex, it may become difficult to
construct a sexual identity while there is other bar patrons occupying the same space. Forging an identity towards leather can be interrupted by people from the gay community that are patronizing the bar simultaneously who are generally not exhibiting leather dress and masculine symbolisms. With the gay clientele utilizing most of the same spaces as the Track XXIII attendees on Friday and Saturday nights, the leather identity can be diffused with the gay identities already forged by many of the run attendees. I felt the leather environment and atmosphere enhanced by the attendees were not diffused, and actually was enhanced by their presence at the Chute, Blu Bar and Georges Pub.

This thought is carried through Track XXIII, even though the run attendees arrived with more than one identity. They also left home others, including their identity with their family, with different groups of friends (both heterosexual and homosexual), and with their employers. Run attendees sometimes conceal them, while other times revealing their gay identities. But at the time of the Track XXIII registration, many attendees have already arrived by car or plane, and are checking in wearing casual clothes and shoes, usually the items they wore when they arrived in Nashville. This is far from the leather dress expected by leatherfolk, but eventually, they will be partaking in the Conductors’ Anniversary run events wearing their black leather dress and masculine created persona.

Simultaneously, other attendees who are registering are already wearing their masculinity via denim jeans or leather pants, a leather or motorcycle club tee-shirt (or may be bare-chested), and a leather or club vest. Regardless of which case, by the time Track XXIII is fully commencing, and the first complimentary cocktail party has begun,
the attendees will be dressed in some form of leather exhibiting the leather symbolisms and semiotics that identify them as leatherfolk. In the early hours of the run weekend, the attendees will be greeting old friends and meeting new ones. They will be studying the run program book to decide which bar to visit during the bar crawl later that evening—if any at all, or plotting their moves with others for private fun. Regardless if the attendees participate in run functions, or engage in leathersex in their private rooms, the performance of sexual identity had begun. This concludes my observations of the leather run spaces. The following chapter is my observation on identities within the leather run spaces.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

“...we all know that it is possible to dress up in leather and yet not know what it means. Yet to most people in leather it means more than the costume of black dyed cowhide, for even those without leather can practice leathersex. Leather people cover a broad spectrum of tastes, not all of it overlapping, but all are sexual outlaws and our practices have overtones of the socially forbidden.”

Sloyd, *Spirituality and the Leather Lifestyle*.

The history of leather runs have been an intricate part of the leather community’s growth and development. This gay and lesbian subculture is made up of spaces where performativity of one’s sexual identity as a leatherfolk through the use of space and place is constructed. I base my study on the informal, semi-structured form of observation and participatory methodology which I conducted while attending the Conductors’ Anniversary run Track XXIII entitled *Star Track*. My knowledge of the leather culture and my participation in SM and leathersex has shaped and structured my research and addressed the drawbacks of using this method of research in Chapter 4.

As this study demonstrated, the Conductors’ Anniversary leather run involved the construction of an attendee’s sexual identity. This conclusion was based on my observations of the ways in which Track XXIII attendees negotiated the aesthetic discourse of leather within the leather run space. My participation in this weekend long
event added to the interpretations of the leather symbolisms and semiotics that are important factors in the construction of leather identities. The other run attendees and I became an integral part of the leather run space, and were an extension of the leather culture and cultural practices.

In general, identity is constructed and enacted through everyday social and cultural practices, through the negotiation of a mixture of shifting and sometimes contradictory cultural arrangements and gendered resources. The work of feminist geographers has shown that social interactions, including gender relations and sexual identities, are constructed socially and negotiated spatially, and are embedded in the spatial organizations of places.

For the past two decades, poststructuralists, feminists and queer theorists in the social sciences have pointed out ways of “re-evaluating sexual identities that allow for different approaches to looking at genders and their relationship to heterosexuality” (Butler, 1990). Queer theory in the social sciences has shown that sexual identities are constantly changing, and the “correspondence between biological sex, gender and desire has been challenged by Butler (1990) so that all gender is seen as necessarily performative, suggesting alternative ways of examining the particular way in which, in Butler’s case, lesbians ‘do’ gender and relate to masculinity and femininity (Mosher, 2006).

This study is about understanding the performance of leatherfolk’s sexual identity, and the production of leather discourse at the Conductors’ Track XXIII Anniversary run. One of the ways in which leather discourse was communicated was
through the visible leather symbols. A leather run attendee’s visibility is one of the ways in which sexual identity is constructed, and plays a part in the process of masculine recognition by other run attendees and the general public. An attendee’s visibility constitutes a leather presence and produces a “queering” of the various run spaces, and that leather is a signifier of masculinity and power in leather subculture. For some leatherfolk, leather visibility is an achievement and is part of a claim for space and acknowledgement.

Leather run space emits hypermasculine visual stimuli of leather symbolism and semiotics that is visible throughout the run space. The repertory of run events, the leather activities (SM and leathersex), and leather imagery (leather dress) are negotiated spatially. Track XXIII leatherspace constitutes leather dress, sexual interest and attitudes, and social engagement and networking by leather clubs represented at the leather run event. This is followed by the gay bars playing host (The Chute Complex, and to a lesser extent, Blu Bar and Nightclub and Georges Pub), and the social and play spaces. All of these factors play a role in the constructing of one’s sexual identity as leatherfolk.

The purpose of this study was to explore and develop an understanding of the performativity of identity and place among leatherfolk at leather run events. Using Judith Butler’s concept of performativity and identity, the objective of this study was to discover how leather runs socially construct sexual identity among the attendees. For this, I observed and participated in a leather run and examined the leather spaces where performativity was engaged. It is through this research that I developed an understanding of the performance of identity and place among the participants at Track XXIII.
In this study, space has multiple stages. Throughout the course of Track XXIII leather run, events were occurring in succession beginning with the Friday evening registration and the first of ten complimentary cocktail parties. From there, bar crawls, people games/poker run, a luncheon, a brunch, an Anniversary run show, and formal cocktail party and Anniversary banquet filled the run schedule until Sunday afternoon with the First Ladies Tea post-run event. The events were also occurring simultaneously, including the Saturday luncheon and people games at the Chute complex, and the Friday and Saturday night bar crawl, hosted by the Chute complex, Blu Bar and Nightclub and Georges Pub.

Space is also temporary and ephemeral. It is temporary because the hotel spaces were rented for this particular run event. The banquet facilities may have had a wedding reception prior to Track XXIII, and another function may be scheduled the following weekend. It is also short-lived because this run is an annual event held in mid-March and takes place only for three days between Friday and Sunday. On a smaller scale, each run event during each day, occurred at scheduled times of the day, and once complete, are not repeated until the following year. For Track XXIII, the people games and Anniversary run show are always held on Saturday afternoon followed by the luncheon. This is preceded by free time where run attendees can relax or venture out and pursue sightseeing or other points of interests in Nashville.

While participating in Track XXIII, my observation led to three questions: first, how is the leather run space divided; second, how did the leather run enabled the performativity of sexual identities among the attendees; third, is the performativity of
sexuality discussed within the context of construction of sexual identities? These questions were addressed using a feminist geographical approach on the subject matter in that the focus was on Track XXIII attendees’ real world spatial experiences and the leather spaces that were within the geographies where the run event occurred.

The leather run space is fundamentally divided into two primary geographic spaces, the gay bars, and the Days Inn hotel. At the gay bars, the Chute was the site of some run events while Blu played host to one cocktail party on Saturday night. Georges Pub was the only site that had no run event schedule outside of it being one of the Track XXIII shuttle stops on Friday night. They played host to run attendees who were interested in visiting these establishments during the bar crawl, and the attendance to these two were moderate in number as opposed to the number of run attendees who attended the bar crawl at the Chute.

All in all, it is the run spaces that enabled attendees to perform sexual identities. They were able to identify themselves as leatherfolk, and were able to construct their sexual identity through performativity using both visual and physical stimuli of hypermasculine symbolism. This was accomplished by the black leather dress, or at times, the lack of leather articles. Leatherfolk identity was associated with what they wore and how the leather space was presented (visual cues), and what they did as a homogeneous group (activity cues). The visual cues were primarily from the black leather dress or “second skin” (as it is sometimes referred to) that the attendees wore. During the registration, people games, the Anniversary run show and “eye openers”
breakfasts and the Sunday Brunch and awards presentations, attendees wore what I refer to as leather casual.

What I observed were articles primarily of denim or leather jeans, boots, a leather shirt or a leather or club vest that was worn with or without a tee-shirt. During the Main cocktail party and Anniversary banquet, formal leather dress was in order, which consisted of attendee’s leather club uniform, finer leather articles, possibly a military uniform or simply leather casual with the addition of leather chaps over denim pants or a white button shirt under the leather vest. It is during the bar crawl and afterhours parties where the fetish gear was worn. To some attendees, it was during these two events where they dressed in articles representing their fetishes like rubber and latex, or SM and leathersex articles, or dressed risqué including some attendees who wore only leather jock straps and chest and body harnesses. The variety and possibilities were many, and the leather vendor in the Hospitality suite provided some attendees more leather dress options.

The afterhours parties was where the most exotic and erotic leather was displayed. It was an erotic space consisting of leather cornucopia of symbolism overload. The Hospitality suite contained masculine representations by the leather clad attendees who emanated power and hypermasculinity. In addition, the play room space, the leather vendor and the temporary leather décor was contained within the confines of a place isolated nine floors above ground level. The outcome was that this suite was transformed into a hypermasculine leather space and the performativity of sexual identity was most prominent.
Achieving the same results in the Hospitality space during the after hours events was not as pronounced during other Track XXIII events. The leather masculinity displayed by attendees during the bar crawl was almost as dynamic as the afterhours parties where some attendees wore fetish and leathersex wares. I felt that some of the construction of sexual identity was being achieved at the Chute’s Nashville Eagle bar space, and to a lesser extent, at the Country Roundup bar. The Eagle was situated far enough away from the other bars that it did not diffuse the hypermasculine space being occupied by mostly run attendees. The other bar patrons mixed and mingled throughout the Chute complex, but the leather center of gravity was in the Eagle bar.

It was not only the leather dress that defines leatherfolk and their sexual identity, but also how they perform. People perform differently in places whether it is in the privacy of their home, a gay bar, a leather run, or another leather related environment. In the run spaces, attendees interact among other participants through many of the scheduled events (activity cues), and where they perform spatially between two persons, or in larger groups. Attendees indeed associate themselves with the leather community, and Track XXIII provided a stage, where a shared sense of community, brotherhood and camaraderie was performed.

Butler’s approach on performativity is concentrated not on the individual, but on the process of the individual’s experiences. In this study, an attendee’s identity was established through the process of constructing a sexual identity. Her observation on the performative nature of gender and drag is similar to the hypermasculine drag of leather culture. She states that “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate
“act,” but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler, 1993, 2). She continues where “…construction is neither a subject nor its act, but a process of reiteration by which both “subjects” and “acts” come to appear at all,” and that “construction not only takes place in time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms” (Butler 1993, 10). The social construction took place by the attendees who were the subjects, during the run event weekend which was the act, through leather symbolisms that were the visual cues, while their performances during engagements in conversations, participations, interactions and/or SM and leathersex were the activity cues. The Track XXIII attendees demonstrated ways in which they socially managed or presented their sexual identities in leather run spaces.

The leather hypermasculine results during Track XXIII would not have been achieved if the run attendees wore other types of clothing not associated with leather dress. People dressed for shopping or attending business meetings require a different wardrobe altogether. The attendees may arrive and depart wearing jeans, tee-shirts and running shoes, but not while the run is commencing. Socio-economic factors do not play a role in leatherfolk’s run attendance, and an attendee’s professional work, social status, and race and gender are not factors in the reason leatherfolk attend runs. Though there is no research or demographic information to prove otherwise, my observations as a leatherman conclude that many gay non-whites and other ethnic minority groups do not as frequently join leather clubs, nor do they attend leather runs as often. My own
personal leather experiences concur that I have met or witnessed few non-whites during my participation in leather runs.

In the end, this study makes three contributions. Conceptually, this empirical study examined the concepts of leather symbolisms and semiotics that were portrayed in the leather run spaces, and of the visual and activity performances displayed by the run attendees who occupied the run spaces. Theoretically, the leather run was the center of run attendees’ formation of their sexual identity, and that it was socially constructed using Judith Butler’s concepts of performativity. And finally, through methodology, the procedural methods of observation and participatory employed in this study, and the principles and procedures of field work inquiry used as part of the methodology, this study was able to determine the conclusion and the reasoning behind it.

In conclusion, this qualitative study identified factors in the identification formation among leatherfolk, illuminated the process through which sexual identities are socially constructed in leather space, documenting the process and outcome of the Conductors’ Anniversary run Track XXIII, and exposes this unique and dynamic subculture which is underrepresented in geographic literature.

The Geographical analysis of the Conductors’ run is important for a couple of reasons. First, the performativity of sexual identities is geographically embedded. Track XXIII was the site where the social construction of attendee’s sexual identity was performed. Second, the leather run space is both temporal and ephemeral as explained previously. The place where Track XXIII occurred was scheduled for a specific period of time in both hotel and bar space that are not permanent locales. Third, the leather
discourse that transpired between run attendees within the leather run spaces shaped their sexual identity. Their sense of place was displayed in these spaces where brotherhood, camaraderie and a sense of belonging were experienced. These are important factors to the leather perceptions within the social interactions and cultural meaning of a leather run, and they played a critical role in the social construction of each attendee’s sexual identity.
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APPENDIX

LEATHER CLUBS REPRESENTED AT TRACK XXIII.

Argonauts, Milwaukee, WI
Atlanta S/M Solidarity, Atlanta, GA
Atoms of Minneapolis, Minneapolis, MN
Blue Max C/C, St. Louis, MO
Capital Leathermen, Raleigh, NC
Castaways M/C, Milwaukee, WI
Centurions of Columbus, Columbus, Ohio
Chicago Leather Club, Chicago, IL
Chicago Rodeo Riders, Chicago, IL
Conductors L/L, Nashville, TN
Corn Haulers L&L, Des Moines, IA
Crescent City Outlaws, New Orleans, LA
Gateway M/C, St. Louis, MO
Greenville Renegades, Greenville, SC
Grand Rapids Rivermen, Grand Rapids, MI
Gryphons of Dayton, Dayton, OH
Highland, LLC, Fayetteville, NC
Iron Eagles, Inc., Canton, OH
K.C. Pioneers, Kansas City, MO
Knighthawks of Virginia, Inc., Norfolk, VA
Leather Engineers of Omaha, Omaha, NE
Lexington Lyons Leather and Levi Club, Lexington, KY
Lone Star Leathermen, San Antonio, TX
Louisville Nightwings, Louisville, KY
Louisville Trailblazers, Louisville, KY
Minnesota Storm Patrol, Minneapolis, MN
Panther L/L, Atlanta, GA
PMC (Pittsburgh Motorcycle Club), Pittsburgh, PA
Rangers, Inc., Akron/Cleveland, OH
Rogues Leather Levi Club, Roanoke, VA
Seattle Men in Leather, Seattle, WA
Smokey Mountain Rodeo Association, Nashville, TN
Tennessee Gryphons, Knoxville, TN
Tennessee Leather Tribe, Memphis, TN
Tradesmen Leather/Levi Club, Charlotte, NC
Tribe, Detroit, MI
Trident International Windy City, Chicago, IL
Tsarus, Memphis, TN
Welcome Everyone!

The Brotherhood of the Conductors would like to welcome you to Nashville and Track XXIII – Star Track. This is our 23rd Anniversary and we are honored to have you as our guests as we celebrate this milestone. Nothing makes our club prouder to know that each of you cared enough to put your lives on hold and come see us this weekend.

As with all runs, we would ask you to take a moment to review this Run Booklet to familiarize yourself with the rules, schedules and planned activities we have laid out for you this weekend. Our evening activities begin at our home bar, The Chute and our late night activities will also be located at the premier bar of this hotel.

Months of planning and hours of preparation went into the staging of our 23rd anniversary. This labor of love is all for you— including the show you will attend on Saturday afternoon. Don’t forget – your charitable donations during that show go directly to our PWA fund and separate Charities Fund, so please be generous.

If you find yourself with free time during the run or plan on staying afterwards, Nashville is a hot bed of entertainment and social pleasure. The downtown core is just across the river and it hosts plenty of shopping and restaurants. On your journey, you’ll see the Hard Rock Café, and the Wild Horse Salon on Second Avenue in the District. If you venture further, you’ll find the Country Music Hall of Fame and the old Ryman Theatre, the original home of the Grand Old Opry.

Our club celebrates monthly at the Chute by hosting a club night, every second Friday. If you come to town any time during the year, please contact us, we’d love to see you – at a club night or any night for that matter.

Unpack, relax and we hope you enjoy yourself at Track XXIII – Star Track.

Thanks again for being here and we hope you enjoy your time in Nashville.

In Brotherhood,
The Conductors
TRACK XXIII

Important Rules and Information
(Please read and follow)

1. NO PINNING involving dick exposure or sucking, or any type of Indecent Exposure at The Chute or any public place (all areas except the 9th floor Hospitality Suite of the hotel).
2. Clothing in public areas (everywhere except the 9th floor Hospitality Suite of the hotel) MUST be publicly acceptable. Bare Asses in the Bars or Hotel CAN GET YOU ARRESTED.
3. Nashville laws require everyone to have a Picture ID ($1) when in the bars. Be prepared to show your ID if asked upon entry to The Chute.
4. Please wear your run pin or run ID badge at all functions and to The Chute to avoid being asked to pay a cover.
5. After-hours parties are restricted to registered Track XXIII Participants who may each bring ONE guest. You MUST provide your guest with the guest pass from your run packet, accompany your guest to the hotel and the party, and pay a $10 fee for your guest’s admission. The guest must provide a photo ID. All after hours functions end at 4:00 AM. Please remember that you are responsible for your guest’s conduct.
6. NO SMOKING in any area of the hotel (including the Hospitality Suite), except for designated smoking rooms and the outside balcony of the Hospitality Suite.
7. All posted play area rules MUST be followed. Violators will be asked to leave the play areas.
8. Non-prescription drugs and pets are prohibited.
9. All participants are encouraged to take the shuttle buses to the bars due to a shortage of available parking and to avoid getting a DUI.
10. Parking in unauthorized areas can result in your vehicle being towed, tow charges, and inconvenience.
11. Please do not publish any photographs taken at Track XXIII without obtaining approval from the individual(s) in the photo.
12. Track XXIII is a Mid-America Conference of Clubs Sanctioned Event and points for all events are awarded using the MACC Point System.

BOOZE IT & LOSE IT!

Lose your license, your freedom, your life.
# Shuttle Bus Schedule

### 18-Mar

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### 19-Mar

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<tr>
<th>AM</th>
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<th>Hotel</th>
<th>Leaves</th>
<th>Arrives</th>
<th>Leaves</th>
<th>Arrives</th>
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### Shuttle Bus Schedule

#### 19-Mar

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<th>Blu</th>
<th>Chute</th>
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<td>1:55 AM</td>
<td>Bus1</td>
<td>No service</td>
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<td>2:10 AM</td>
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#### AM

#### Sun PM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaves Chute</th>
<th>Arrives Airport</th>
<th>Arrives Hotel</th>
<th>Leaves Hotel</th>
<th>Arrives Chute</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:45 PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:00 – 10:00 PM</td>
<td><strong>Registration</strong>&lt;br&gt;9th Floor Sky View Room Days Inn&lt;br&gt;Welcome to Track XXIII</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:00 – 7:00 PM</td>
<td><strong>Opening cocktail party</strong>&lt;br&gt;Sponsored by Georges Pub</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:00 – 8:00 PM</td>
<td><strong>Barbecue ‘Vittles</strong>&lt;br&gt;sandwiches &amp; fixin's – Sky View Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:00 – 8:00 PM</td>
<td><strong>Cocktail Party</strong>&lt;br&gt;courtesy of The Crescent City Outlaws&lt;br&gt;9th Floor Sky View Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30 – 9:30 PM</td>
<td><strong>Cocktail Party</strong>&lt;br&gt;courtesy of The Tradesmen&lt;br&gt;9th Floor Sky View Room</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9:30 PM</td>
<td><strong>Shuttle Service</strong> Begins to Georges, continues to the Chute</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00 – 1:00 AM</td>
<td><strong>Boot Black</strong> in The Eagle at The Chute&lt;br&gt;courtesy of IML 2002 Boot Black</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:15 AM</td>
<td><strong>Last Shuttle</strong> leaves The Chute</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:30 – 4:00 AM</td>
<td><strong>After Hours</strong>&lt;br&gt;Cocktail Party –&lt;br&gt;courtesy of Louisville Knight Wings&lt;br&gt;9th Floor Sky View Room</td>
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</table>
### Schedule of Events

Saturday, March 19th

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00 – 10:30 AM</td>
<td><strong>Coffee and Morning Munchies</strong>&lt;br&gt;9th Floor Sky View Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-11:30 AM</td>
<td><strong>Eye Openers</strong>&lt;br&gt;courtesy of Tsaurus&lt;br&gt;9th Floor Sky View Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:45 – 11:15 AM</td>
<td><strong>Boot Black</strong>&lt;br&gt;courtesy of&lt;br&gt;9th Floor Sky View Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 PM</td>
<td><strong>Shuttle Service</strong> begins to the Chute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:45 – 1:30 PM</td>
<td><strong>Lunch</strong> at The Chute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 – 2:30 PM</td>
<td><strong>People Events / Poker Run</strong>&lt;br&gt;The Chute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30 – 3:00 PM</td>
<td><strong>Cocktail Party</strong>&lt;br&gt;courtesy of Gateway&lt;br&gt;MC</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:45 – 4:00 PM</td>
<td><strong>Track XXIII Anniversary Show</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:15 PM</td>
<td><strong>Double Shuttle Run</strong> back to the&lt;br&gt;Days Inn at the Coliseum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Schedule of Events
Saturday Evening, March 19th

4:45 PM  Last shuttle returns from The Chute

4:45 – 5:45 PM  Demonstration – Boot Black
9th Floor Sky View Room
courtesy of

4:15 – 6:30 PM  Free Time

6:30-7:30 PM  Main Cocktail Party -
courtesy of Panthers L/L
9th Floor Sky View Room

7:45 – 9:15 PM  Parade of Colors
Anniversary Banquet
Days Inn 1st Floor Banquet Room

9:30 PM  Shuttle Service for Blu and
The Chute

10:30-11:30  Cocktail Party at Blu – courtesy of the Smokey Mountain Rodeo Association

11:55 PM  Last Shuttle leaves from Blu!

11:00 – 1:00 AM  Boot Black in The Eagle
courtesy of IML 2002 Boot Black

2:10 AM  Last Shuttle leaves The Chute

2:30 – 4:00 AM  After Hours
Cocktail Parties -
courtesy of Conductor Associates
9th Floor Sky View Room
3:00 – 4:00 AM
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00 – 10:30 AM</td>
<td>Coffee and Morning Munchies</td>
<td>9th Floor Sky View Room Days Inn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 – 10:30 AM</td>
<td>Eye Openers - Conductor Alumni</td>
<td>9th Floor Sky View Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 AM</td>
<td>Breakfast Buffet Awards Presentations</td>
<td>Days Inn 1st Floor Banquet Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 PM</td>
<td>First Shuttle to The Chute</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00 PM</td>
<td>Late Hotel Check Out - The Chute Opens</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1:30 PM</td>
<td>Last Shuttle to The Chute</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:45 PM</td>
<td>First Shuttle from The Chute to the airport</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:15 – 3:15 PM</td>
<td>First Ladies Tea - The Chute</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:00 PM</td>
<td>Replay of Track XXIII Show</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:45 PM</td>
<td>Last shuttle from The Chute to the airport</td>
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</table>
Funds raised during Track XXIII from tips and donations during the Show and other run-related fund raising events are to be divided equally between the Conductor’s PWA fund and general Charity fund. We respect and appreciate the generous spirit in which the money is donated as we work to assist those individuals who have special needs because of their AIDS related illnesses and as we strive to assist with other worthy causes in the community.

In the late 1980's, we began to see the need in community for general charity assistance. This assistance may or may not be specifically related to people with AIDS but still is an act of charity and kindness. We maintain a general Charity Fund to help with these additional identified needs. From prior donations during our Rums, other fundraisers and from our general fund and pledges' funds we've been able to assist with different types of requests for assistance. During the past year the Conductors' Charity Fund made contributions to Children Fighting AIDS, Kids With AIDS, Nashville Pride, and to other Brother Clubs' charity drives.

The Conductors' PWA Fund distributes funds to Nashville Cares and the Comprehensive Care Center for their client's special needs not provided for under other assistance programs. This can cover such requests as uncovered prescription drug costs, household bills that can’t be met due to sickness in an individual's life, holiday meals for HIV+ folks who are homebound, and transportation costs to bring a family member to the bed side of a sick or dying AIDS patient.

In 2004, recent changes in Federal laws pertaining to housing has resulted in reduced funding to assist HIV individuals in locating appropriate shelter. Changes in TennCare regulations, particularly with respect to application fees, have also resulted in additional demands on resources, and in particular on non-governmental agencies. As the demands have increased, the need for funding is ever greater. The Conductors have assisted in meeting these needs.

Without your assistance, this would not be possible. We are truly humbled by the generosity of our Nashville family and our extended family through association with other leather clubs throughout the country. We thank those individuals, Clubs, our run participants / guests, the Conductors Associates, The Chute Complex, OUTLOUD! and a host of others who contributed to our fund raising efforts.

You Are Our Shining Star!

In 2004, more than $9,400 in donations and contributions has been returned to various organizations within the Nashville community. Our most sincerest THANKS to everyone who helped support The Conductors efforts in these causes.

"Everyone is necessarily the hero of his own life story."—John Barth
THANKS

Track XXIII would not have been possible without the support of our many friends, clubs and organizations.

The Conductors would like to extend a special thanks to the following:

The Chute Complex & Staff
The Conductors Alumni
The Conductors Associates

The Centurions of Columbus
Seattle Men in Leather
Tradesmen
Tsarus

Atlanta Leather Company / Suncoast Resorts
Ambrosia Catering
Nashville Cares / Rainbows Edge
The Days Inn at the Coliseum
Flair Tours!

Jack Daniel’s Tennessee Whiskey
Budweiser
Miller
Standard Candy Company
Westridge Laboratories ID Lubricant
Trigg Laboratories - WET
George McIntyre
OUTLOUD!
nashvillegayweb.com
Out and About in Nashville
Xenogen

Vanderbilt HIV Vaccine Program
The Comprehensive Cares Unit
The Nashville Gay Community
THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING OUR SUMMIT.

SEE YOU NEXT YEAR!

Conductors