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Playing On-Line

Sexual Subjectivity, Gender Play
and
the Construction of the Dyke SM Fantasy

Katharine Adrienne Setzer

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

Playing On-Line
Sexual Subjectivity, Gender Play and the Creation of the Dyke SM Fantasy

Katharine Adrienne Setzer

This project explores the intersection of fantasy and mediation; the erotic interplay between the dyke SM fantasy, sexual and gender identitty and the computer mediated communication practices of on-line chatting and email correspondence. The dyke SM fantasy, when toyed with in cyberspace produces a multiplicity and fluidity of sexual and gender perspectives and positionings. Through the creation and play of avatars and alternate personae within the chatroom space and in emailing, the performative nature of dyke SM subjectivity and identity(ies) is exposed and becomes erotically available for sexual/gender interrogations.

The dyke SM fantasy, as a narrative is introduced to set the scene for virtual travels through the sexually-based chatrooms of AOL and the erotic writing of emails. Once in cyberspace, a fictional character, the transgender cyborg is created for theoretical and erotic illustration of the power of such performances and to stand as a personal emblem for such on-line playings. Considering this character as an edge-dweller -- existing only in the cyberfray and in the fantastic -- the multiplicity of sexual and gender identity is further unveiled.

However, at the end of these travels what emerges is not only pleasingly productive, but problematic as well. As sites that compose an on-line dyke SM community, surveillance and monitoring of these sex/gender performances function to inspire a troubling degree of conformity within the cyber ranks. These limitations ultimately curb the productive potential of dyke SM play on-line.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The "World Report" section of the May 6, 2000 *Globe and Mail* carried a small but ominously toned article titled "On-Line Sex Addiction at Dangerous Level". The item went on to describe that:

> On-line sex addiction is·a growing epidemic that is tearing partners apart and creating a dangerous new compulsion affecting everyone from housewives to gay men and corporate executives...The Internet's anonymous and instant gratification is surprisingly appealing to women, who prefer the interaction in sex chat rooms to leering at pornographic pictures, experts said during a seminar on cybersex at a conference of the National Council on Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity... Research shows that an estimated 15 per cent of Internet users have visited on-line sex chatrooms or pornographic sites. The numbers were nearly equal for men and women.

A few things can be taken from this article, its effects, and the reaction of my peers. First, through the wording and general flavour of the piece it is obvious that cybersex, with its anonymous and instantly gratifying effects, is now a global pastime, luring in everyone from defenceless housewives to gays to even the powerful CEO. Secondly, on-line sex has become so problematic as to have garnered the prestigious character of "sexual addiction" or "compulsion" and women are the most intrigued (and addicted?) by this form of sexual interaction. And finally, according to those nearest to me, I must suffer from this affliction as well.[1]

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[1] As I was well entrenched in the writing of this project at the time this article appeared in the *Globe & Mail*, interestingly close to 10 of my friends and colleagues cut out the item and saved it for me.

This thesis seeks to explore this attraction, albeit from an angle certainly not touched upon by the *Globe and Mail*. Within these pages I will investigate the intersection of fantasy and mediation; the erotic interplay between the dyke SM[2] fantasy, sexual and gender identity and the computer mediated communication practices of on-line chatting and email correspondence.

Locating my interrogations within the academic discipline of cultural studies, and in particular queer studies, my research method in this project is in a way a "scavenger methodology", as Judith Halberstam describes in her introduction to *Female Masculinity*:

> A queer methodology, in a way is a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour. Queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other and it refuses the academic impulse towards disciplinary coherence. (13)

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[2] Throughout this thesis I will be using the shorthand "SM" to describe a set of sexual, social and political practices within lesbianism. SM, often termed as S/M, or S & M is described by Anne McClintock as a "sub-culture of organized fetishism. The term S/M thus includes a wide variety of fetishes: B and D (bondage and discipline), CP (corporeal punishment) TV (transvestitism), babyism, scat, body piercing, foot fetishism and so on. These fetishes should be seen as sometimes overlapping, sometimes distinct sub-genres in a general sub-culture of collective fetish ritual." ("Maid to Order: Commercial S/M and Gender Power" In Pamela Church and Roma Gibson (eds.) 1993 *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power* London: British Film Institute, p. 228) While this definition serves to cover the bases of SM practices, it does not make a distiction between lesbian, gay or straight SM. I believe that the forms that SM takes differ greatly between these sexual identities, though there are less differences between lesbian and gay SM as the two are often conflated into the the term Queer SM.

Borrowing from the disciplinary traditions of comparative literature, psychoanalysis, feminist and communication theory, I will position myself and speak to a dyke SM sexuality; to question its relationship to feminism, queer theory, and specifically to interrogate and explore the construction of subjectivities, gender identifications, sexual positionings and perspectives within the dyke SM fantasy. As well, I will enter into the realm of technological mediation, to question how this mediation inspires, recasts and inevitably alters the flavour and nature of erotic communications to further produce a multiplicity of subjectivities and a fluidity of sexual positionings and gender identifications. On-line, this multiplicity and fluidity is attained through the construction and play of assumed selves within these virtual spaces. And further, this convergence of technology and fantasy allows for an easy psychical/sexual connection between the virtual and the fantastic to emerge through their shared materiality.

This materiality is echoed by Sherry Turkle in her analysis of identity, TinySex and virtual gender-bending within the world of the Internet. As she states:

> Although (these cybersexual interactions) involve other people and are no longer pure fantasy, they are not 'in the world'. Their boundary status offers new possibilities. TinySex and virtual gender-bending are part of the larger story of people using virtual spaces to construct identity. (1995:226)

While Turkle's work speaks to the more general issues of identity construction and sexuality as played at and with over the Internet, her words are insightful.

Coupled with a more complex sexual configuration, such as the SM dyke, this "boundary status" is full of erotic possibilities. Therefore, on this technological edge -- located somewhere between fantasy and non-fantasy (or reality) -- it is possible to conceive of an "exercising of the (SM) pervert's prerogative" (Adams) to not only construct identity, but to create many identities, many selves, many sexual positionings and perspectives.

The boundary status of communications such as on-line chatting and email correspondence contribute to the sexual and creative expanses that make up dyke SM fantasy-space(s). It is at this intersection, where the practice of fantasy construction converges with an unlimited venue for sexual interaction, such as the Internet, that the multiple nature of subjectivity and identity can fully be realized and thus explored. Thus, through contemplating these mediated sites of virtual communication I will address the slippery and elusive qualities of sexual identity construction, and in particular how it is formed through on-line interactions.

As my starting point, in Chapter One I explore the discursive terrain of the written story of dyke SM, the erotic fictitious accounts and narratives which function to produce the fantasy and fantasy-thinking. As a literary genre, and a cultural production, dyke SM sex writing tells us much about the styles of sexual imagining employed within the fantasy, their subcultural impact and theoretically how they inspire and motivate. Drawing from the work of Pat Califia and reviewing the seminal anthologies *Coming to Power* and *The Second Coming* what emerges through this fiction is both a need to challenge

the modes of erotic writing while at the same time intentionally confronting lesbian feminism and its impact on a dyke SM sexual subjectivity and perspective.

Interestingly, it is this fiction which serves as fodder for theoretical interrogations of both lesbian sadomasochism and the dyke SM fantasy. Relying heavily on psychoanalysis, Mandy Merck, Julia Creet and Parveen Adams unravel the theoretical underpinnings of SM as a sexual practice, a moral (or ethical) transgression and an emancipatory sexual stance. Through the work of Sherry Turkle and Judith Butler an analytical thread is formed between dyke SM as a subjective position and the performativity of gender. Combining Turkle's analysis of the Internet as an open territory free of identification and thus potentially potent sexually with Butler's theories of gender as performance, a perspective emerges which casts the dyke SM fantasy as sexually productive, theatrically dense and importantly open for resignification and recontextualization.

Focusing specifically on the virtual world of the chatroom and the computer mediated communication practice of emailing, in Chapter Two I log on to examine and explore the erotic locations and possibilities of playing on-line, touching upon the styles and forms that on-line relationships and interactions can take and the limitations of such encounters and dalliances. Through the creation of cyber avatars and alternate sexual/gender personae the potential of creating multiple and fluid identifications and subjects is almost infinite; adding erotic fuel to the fire of dyke SM fantasy production while at the same

time imposing curious and surprising restrictions on fantasy-thinkings and sexual explorations. Taking Butler's theories of gender perfomance and performativity to task within the space of the chatroom and the communication practice of emailing I examine the sometimes pleasurable and sometimes highly problematic virtual reality of sexual subjectivity and genderplay on-line.

And finally, in Chapter Three I offer up a possible figure or emblem for this cyber-interrogation in the form of the transgender cyborg -- an identity which encapsulates nicely the problematics and pleasures of playing on-line while it acknowledges the complexities of gender and sexual subjectivities within both the cyber and theoretical terrain. Coupling Judith Halberstam's theories of female masculinity and transgenderism with Donna Haraway's analytical gift of the cyborg, this figure functions as my theoretical traveler through these cyber terrains. Although refreshingly utopian in nature, this character is fraught with complications, through the limitations of the environment in which it seeks to sexually operate. Conjuring up the metaphors of territories, boundaries and borders, the on-line community, through its established set of codes, rules and protocol becomes a space of surveillance and ultimately promotes conformity. These watched and monitored territories share much with contemporary lesbian cultural communities, and as such, much the same way as the SM dyke functions as both a part of and an opposition to those spaces, so too does the transgender cyborg within the chatroom.

As we become increasingly more reliant and faithful of the promises of on-line communications -- for our sexual pleasures, our social connections with others

and by extension then our conceptions of ourselves and our place within the global world -- it is crucial to examine the locations, the productions and the limitations of such sites of such sociosexual interactions. Specifically, in the creation of the dyke SM fantasy, these on-line erotic sites have altered the styles, forms and methods used in constructing, reconstructing and reconfiguring our desires, our sexual subjectivities and our gender identifications. With these heady objectives in mind, I enter into the cyber world, to hopefully address -- if only to tease out -- the implications, possibilities and ultimately the problematic pleasures at stake in playing on-line.

CHAPTER ONE
SETTING THE DYKE SM SCENE(S)

The SM dyke, as Parveen Adams describes, is a "new sexuality" that is not organized around a single "paternal phallus" but rather "exercises the pervert's prerogative and constructs... many fetishes, many pleasures, many fantasies, which she tries on like costumes". (Merck:1993, 242) This newly open sexuality, if it does indeed construct and play with a multiple of fetishes and fantasies, is most evident within a genre of expression identifiable as "erotica", or sex writing and media arts representations. This work can be seen as the recording of these many fantasies, fetishes and pleasures; telling of the stories of this reconsidered sexuality and its play of construction.

In keeping with Adams' notion of many fantasies and many pleasures, the SM dyke as a sexual subject offers an enticing entry into a creative world of multiplicity. A multiplicity of subjectivities, of sexual identities and of positionings which construct, re-construct, inform and re-form the boundaries (and the construction) of sexual fantasy and fantasy-thinking. As dyke sex writing and representations explore subject positionings within the SM dyke fantasy, these acts of naming -- of desires, multiple identities, and subjectivities -- produce a discourse of both sexuality and subjectivity. This discourse is political, intellectual and cultural; theories and creative words circulate and effect (affect) one other at this intersection.

In this chapter I will delve into the discursive arena of dyke SM erotic and theoretical writing to map out the narrative or the story of the dyke SM fantasy as it has historically been constructed over (albeit a relatively short period of) time. By laying out the fictional framework and theoretical paradigm(s) within which the SM fantasy circulates, thematic preoccupations emerge; uncovering sexual and gender styles, trends and issues focal to the development of these literary forms over the last decade, and the media arts representations inspired by or inspiring such productions. As a body of work which reflects the cultural transitions and theoretical evolutions within the sphere of (North American) dyke SM sociosexual communities, these avenues of discourse are both distinct from one another and absolutely intertwined; producing not a straightforward trajectory but an intricate web of voices, theories and representations of the dyke SM fantasy.

It is important to state at the beginning of this investigation that such a body of expression develops through parallel, rather than tangential (or isolated) productions within the spheres of academic inquiry, creative fiction and media arts (film/video) representations. New ideas and new representations are not created in vacuums, and as in any evolution, each new tale builds upon the previous one; influencing and inspiring twists and turns in the growth of such narratives of dyke SM sexualities and identities. It is possible then, to consider this relatively new body of work a "genre" and as such to recognize a demarcation of styles, conventions and modes of expression and representation of such sexual and social productions.

As with any described genre, dyke sex writings (fictional and intellectual) and film/video representations can differ greatly from one another; producing a related group of expressive productions which is not homogeneous by any stretch, but rather is fraught with contradictions and conflictions. As well, over time, not only can identifiable modes of expression and stylistic similarities be noticed, but evolutionary developments in themes or subjects adressed become evident. Over the course of my three year investigation, such evolutions within this genre can be seen to reflect similar discourses within queer cultural communities. These changes, or developments as represented through the dyke SM narrative mirror what have been shifts or variances in discourse in the late nineties from works discussing issues of sexual identity (practice) to those of gender identity and its relationships to sexuality, in particular transsexuality and transgenderism.

1.1 DYKE SM SEX WRITING
Contemporary Erotic Fiction

To give an overview of the predominant writers, styles and trends that have influenced (and continue to influence) what could be called contemporary dyke erotic fiction, it is first essential to lay down the terms used in description of such works. To do so is a difficult task, and more importantly there are ever-present dangers of conflation or absolutism rather than suggestive descriptions of such terms. As descriptive terms can easily become definitive, it seems more useful to detail instead what SM dyke sex writing *is not*, rather than what

it exactly is. What follows then is a short list of the issues SM (or radical sex) writing consciously (or unconsciously) transgresses.

Number one, SM sex writing is not interested in prescribing boundaries around acceptable sexual representational behaviours, historically often connected to lesbian feminism. As Julia Creet sardonically states, "The feminist notion of desire redefines the missionary position: as we lie side by side we feel our equality. But what happens when we get on top of one another? Are we still equal?" (1991:155) Two, it is not necessarily limited to same-sex (lesbian, woman on woman) sexual experiences. For example, in many of the recent "Daddy" stories, the Daddy written about is a gay man. As well, as transgenderism and transsexuality have moved to the forefront of dyke SM discourses, the FTM or "Transman" increasingly makes an appearance in this erotica, altering the flavour of these written fantasies in profound ways. And finally, SM sex writing is often not easy to read. It can be challenging, or disturbing to one's own beliefs or past experiences. As SM sex writing deals with plays of power and descriptions of sex scenes of role playing involving dominance and subordination -- the daddy-little girl, daddy-little boy, master and slave scenarios, etc. -- the effect of such reading can be disturbing in that the reader is transported back to self-historical places that may be uncomfortable.

In researching this project over a three year period it is evident that particular trends or preoccupations have arisen while others have receded or become absent from the stories. At the beginning of my explorations in 1996 much of the SM sex writing offered narratives hinged upon fantasies of domination and

subordination in the form of strict top-bottom scenarios and butch-femme role playing tales. Slowly, over time, interrogations of gender identities and positionings, genderplay and genderbending emerged in the works and scenarios and most recently these explorations within the SM fantasy have developed into narratives involving issues of transgenderism and transsexuality, including fiction with FTM or MTF (female to male or male to female) characters who are either in "transition" or have completely changed their gender.[3]

As well, as the Web has become more and more of a site for publication and/or dissemination of fictional productions, erotic fiction has too found a virtual home. This has allowed for not only more writers to get their stories "out there" but has also given rise to solely web-based writing projects to emerge, and with this very interesting innovations to the erotic fictional form. Departing from narrative conventions found in printed fiction such as a degree of linearity (in that one page follows another in a printed book), these Web-based narrative fantasies ulilize the technological possibilities inherent to the medium and not only include, but often play with notions of story fragmentation

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[3] Moving to the forefront of discourses (both scholarly and creative) surrounding sexual and cultural identities within queer subcultures, issues of transgenderism and transsexuality hold their own particular set of problematics. For more detailed information, both fictional and intellectual providing at least a taste of the issues currently being explored, please see: *My Gender Workbook* (Kate Bornstein,1998, New York: Routledge) as well as the websites: Roughriders (netgsi.com/%7Etransman/roughriders.html), FTM International (ftm-intl.org) and Dykedaddies (dreamwater.com/dykedaddies).

and shifting of subjectivities or subject positionings not possible in the same ways on the printed page.[4]

Within this area of lesbian erotica production or creation a debt is owed to the much talked about 1981 anthology by the lesbian SM support group Samois titled *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M.* This anthology can be seen to have laid the groundwork, or planted the seed for this now flourishing area of both creativity and theorization. As a groundbreaking anthology, *Coming to Power* mixed together different kinds of writing -- short stories, poetry, longer more theoretical pieces and instructional works -- to reflect and speak to the "leatherdyke", creating a sociological overview of this then newly vocal sexual, cultural and political community. This anthology made visible and literary the desires and deviances of many women who practice(d) SM with other women, and by doing so, set the stage for what has now become a well inhabited fictional genre. As Katherine Davis explains, writing on behalf of what she calls "The Ministry of Truth," "*Coming to Power* is a statement, a confrontation, and a challenge. It calls for a re-evaluation of existing lesbian feminist ethics, saying 'You must own your illegitimate children'." (13)

Close to 20 years after its first publication, this anthology still resonates with dykes engaged in (or discovering) SM sexual practices as well as speaking to

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[4] As interesting examples of Web writing projects please see the websites:.Nearly Roadkill (nearlyroadkill.com), Butch-Femme (butch-femme.com) and Roughriders (netgsi.com/%7Etransman/roughriders.html)

the still problematic discourse of the creation and production of dyke SM

cultural communities.[5] Indeed, as I became more and more interested in issues

of SM identity and sexuality, it was this book that I first turned to for

information and answers. Though this was over a decade after these issues

were first (somewhat) widely distributed through *Coming to Power* the

problematics and pleasures of such sexual grapplings were not only similar but

equally as charged. In many ways this anthology can be seen as a bit of an SM

dyke *bible*; full of commandments in the form of SM protocol, and short story

educational scriptures. Though somewhat sarcastic in nature, this comparison

is not so far off:

> Few other works in the modern lesbian literary cannon have created such
> sweeping change. Among other things *Coming to Power* permanently
> altered the discourse on lesbian desire and pornography and challenged
> deeply rooted assumptions about what it means to be a feminist, a lesbian,
> or a woman. (Califia and Sweeney, 1996:xii)

Taking this bible metaphor further, more recently a kind of *New Testament* has

been published in the form of an anthology titled, *The Second Coming: A*

Leatherdyke Reader (1996). This publication, touted as "the long-awaited

sequel to *Coming to Power*", is an illustrative gesture to the widening and

flourishing of a creative (SM dyke) fictional genre almost two decades later.

Much as its forerunner, *The Second Coming* also effectively brings together

different styles and modes of expression -- short fiction, photography, poetry,

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[5] Indeed, as a sure sign of the longevity of *Coming to Power*'s popularity
among dyke SM communities, the book had two more revised and
updated versions published by Alyson Publications in 1982 and 1987.

longer prose, theoretical and more informative essays -- to present a thorough and complex collection of work that speaks to the evolution of this sexual identity and cultural community.

The evolution of dyke SM sociosexual communities and creative practices over almost 20 years are reflected in *The Second Coming* most obviously through the introduction of gender issues into the discourse of lesbian SM sexual identity and practice. As Michael H. Hernandez states, "Gender play has become the rage of the 90's. Instead of dying out like the typical fads that breeze through our community, only to be replaced by the next passing fad, it shows no signs of becoming passé. At least not yet." (63) This shift is significant, and is easily noticed when comparing the first leatherdyke anthology *Coming to Power* with *The Second Coming*. While the 1981 anthology bears no examples of such discourses, there are three very interesting articles included in the newest anthology, with topics ranging from transsexuality, hermaphroditism, transgenderism and the problematics of fluid gender identification.[6]

Along with (or connected to) fiction which deals with genderplay is a recent popularization of "Daddy" stories, which is also represented in *The Second*

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[6] Please see: Laura Antoniou's "Electra on the Rocks: Following the Paradigm Tides", "Dyke With a Dick" by Tala Brandeis, "Boundaries: Gender and Transgenderisms" by Michael H. Hernandez as well as the erotic stories "And I Called Her Boy" (Sossity Oessa Chiricuzio), "Possession" (Sorel Husbands) and "The Quick and the Hungry" (Lisa Carruthers) found in *The Second Coming: A Leatherdyke Reader* (Pat Califia and Robin Sweeney (eds.) 1996 Los Angeles: Alyson Press).

Coming as well as being the topic of Pat Califia's most recent erotic fiction anthology *Doing it For Daddy*. This new character, the Daddy, is a provocative one, and "his" recent appearance in short stories (as well as in independent video and film) offers much for an analysis of the state of contemporary dyke SM sociosexual discourse(s) within the larger community. This new fictionalized identity disconnects butch-like qualities from the shackles of gender roles. Califia argues in her introduction that "masculinity is the spark plug of sexuality, and this may be the key to its survival, even in a world of complete gender equality". By this Califia is suggesting that perhaps the rise of the Daddy role within the leatherdyke community is both a result of and a catalyst for the problematizing of gender within queer discourses:

> Big daddies in these stories may simply be evidence that butchness has been detached from heterosexuality and even the male gender. Masculinity has become a code of honor and a sexual fetish. Like the top-bottom roles of S/M sex or the butch-femme roles of the vanilla lesbian community, daddy-boy, daddy-girl have become polarized fantasy roles that make sex more intense. In fact, Daddy has become so popular that he threatens to eclipse Master as an honorific one for the one who is (usually) running the fuck. (1994:15)

Califia also argues that the Daddy role makes "safer" or easier the practices of SM in that instead of an unforgiving Master who throws out punishments without forgiveness, the Daddy encompasses notions of care-giving and praise for good behaviour. The Daddy character is ultimately, however quite simply well suited to the dyke SM erotic tale. The long ago childhood request, "read me a story, Daddy" sets the fantasy scene, allowing for an easy psychic link to

be forged between real lived experiences of the past and grown-up sexual fantasies of the present.

Riding on the popularity of *Coming to Power*, other erotic literature was to follow, enlarging this genre while pushing the definitive boundaries of (SM) erotic literary representation. Most notably the work of Pat Califia and Laura Antoniou who have been writing and editing erotic fiction since the early eighties. Pat Califia, is often toted as the "Mother" (or is it "Daddy"?) of sex writing and has been enthusiastically and regularly producing erotic fiction (and non-fiction) since the late seventies. Her regularly published articles in *The Advocate*, as well as her sex advice column titled "The Advocate Advisor" have consistently shaken up the North American lesbian and gay communities for a decade and a half.[7] Califia stands as the most prolific and visible of erotic fiction authors within the SM subculture. She has published a number of widely distributed books: two books of short fiction, *Macho Sluts* (1988) and *Melting Point* (1993), a novel, *Doc and Fluff: The Dystopian Tale of a Girl and Her Biker* (1990) and more recently she edited collection of sexy and challenging

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[7] As Califia explains in the introduction to her collection of nonfiction, *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex* (1994), she has spent the last 18 years "fuming and fussing about sexual repression and censorship, bragging about my search for an ever more forbidden way to have an orgasm, struggling (with many others) to form and preserve the modern leather community, making alliances with other sexual minorities, and incurring the wrath of Big Brother, Big Sister and a lot of other people who have too much power and no sense of humor. I've been pretty busy". Indicating the dangers of doing such work in the late seventies within a decidedly anti-SM environment of lesbian feminism, Califia explains that the process of writing "A Secret Side of Lesbianism", one of the first pieces to appear in the gay press about "women who do S/M with other women" in 1979, "had a great impact on all the work I did after that. It created an ecological niche for me as a journalist whose work was simultaneously pornographic, political, and educational."(5)

fiction, *Doing It For Daddy* (1994). Califia has, over the years helped to shape and in many ways define dyke erotic fiction, very much because of her high level of production. She has offered challenges and alternatives to conventions of lesbian erotica, pushing upon the boundaries of "acceptable" lesbian feminist sexual representations.

Califia's fiction functioned (and functions) to re-present and re-articulate a dyke sexual imagination through the terms of SM; offering alternative sex stories than those then (and perhaps even now) filling the pages of lesbian (or women's) erotica.[8] Her short story, "The Hustler" from the book *Macho Sluts*, is a quite blatant example of such challenges and critiques of lesbian feminism. This piece of fiction, written in the mid 80s, tells the tale of systematic control over sexuality, gender identification and behaviour in an unlikely feminist dystopia. Set in the not so far off future, in a women-centered and controlled society after the feminist revolution, a young "undesirable pervert" named Noh Mann is sent to a rehabilitation center after being arrested numerous times for engaging and selling "un-natural (and) counter-revolutionary" sex to "Janes". The main character's response to a committee member's line of interrogation demonstrates Califia's style and strategies well. Asked by the chairperson if she is guilty of either "prostitution or misogyny", Noh Mann replies that she

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[8] Or as Califia calls it, "feminist erotica" which "presents a simplistic view of lesbian sex as two women in love in a bed who embody all the good things the patriarchy is trying to distroy... This stuff reads as if it were written by dutiful daughters who are trying to persuade Mom that lesbian sex isn't dirty, that we really are good girls, after all." (*Macho Sluts* 1988 Boston: Alyson Publications, p.12)

has in fact been charged with both:

> That is to say, the woman who was arrested with me got charged with
> prostitution. They don't prosecute hustlers, just janes, buyers. They
> charged me with misogyny since I had hit her. Sexual harassment too,
> because of my language. It was a felony since I've been busted before. Public
> assumption of sex roles. Some cop didn't like my haircut..." (1990:184)

Califia's work, both fictional and non-fictional has been instrumental in the
development of an SM dyke creative community. For many of us, Califia's
short fiction was the first read dealing specifically with SM themes in a
powerful way and as such inspired fantasy-thinkings as well as creative work of
many kinds.

Equally as prolific as Califia within the genre of dyke SM sex writing are the
authors Laura Antoniou and Carol S. Queen. Antoniou has been editing and
writing dyke erotica since 1993, most notably her anthology series
Leatherwomen (1993, 1995 and 1998) which signifies the first collection of
erotic fiction dealing soley with leatherdyke themes and sexual perspectives. As
well, Antoniou has edited two non-fiction anthologies, *Looking for Mr. Preston*
(1995) and *Some Women* (1997) , and has recently revealed that under the
name of Sara Adamson she has written several novels, including *The Slave*
(1994) and *The Trainer* (1996). Carol S. Queen is the author of two books,
the fictional work *The Leather Daddy and the Femme* (1999) and a collection of
theoretical essays titled *Real Live Nude Girl* (1998). Her work is useful in that

not only does it challenge notions of dyke SM sex as only occuring between women but also brings bisexual subjectivities into fantasy writing.

The growth of this genre in the last 15 years has been enormous, and in particular since the mid 90s there has been an exponential increase in the number of writers and published works adding new voices, styles and strategies while pushing the boundaries of this new sexual imagination through fiction. It is now possible to find numerous anthologies of sex writing and erotica series at the local lesbian and gay bookstore.[9] This increase in SM dyke sex writing available (as well as the quality of it) points to not only the obvious interest, but perhaps the need for it within dyke SM communities.

A good example of this popularity is the annual Cleiss Press *Best Lesbian Erotica* series edited by Tristan Taormino which topped *The Advocate*'s bestseller list with its first edition in 1996. Now in its fifth year of publication, this anthology brings together a variation of very sexy and steamy sex writing that is both thought-provoking and challenging. Taormino's series is notable in that while it brings together writings from many sexual perspectives, and does run the gamut from vanilla stories to hard-core SM tales, the majority of fiction has a decidedly hard edge to it. In tracing the evolution of this series over five years it is possible to follow a trajectory

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[9] Among the most widely published (and available) erotica collections are The Naiad Press Erotica series, many titles published by Alyson Press (among them Califia's work and the two *Coming to Power* and *The Second Coming*). As well there are monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly magazines which publish much lesbian erotic (and as well much SM sex writing), for example, *On Our Backs, Bad Attitude, Frighten the Horses,Taste of Latex, Venus Infers, Brat Attack* and *Lezzie Smut* as well as recently created websites of dyke erotic fiction such as, Psychoerotica (Psychoerotica.com) and Compersion (compersion.com).

which culminates in a new attention to genderplay, Daddy stories and "switching" which is consistent with *The Second Coming*. Furthering this trajectory is the Canadian *Boys Like Her* by a performance and writing ensemble calling themselves "Taste This" (1998). Originating in Vancouver, this group changed its medium of choice from performance based (live) "storytelling" to print and the results are a collection of tales which play with notions of gender identity, sexual perversity and play.

Interestingly, there is an opening up within the genre of dyke sex writing (in tandem with intellectual discourses on lesbian SM and independent film and video productions) rather than a narrowing, allowing for many subjectivities to have voice and materiality as opposed to the more prescriptive (roles and role-playing) categorization of subjectivities (a top or a bottom, a butch or a femme etc.) of previous writing.

As with any genre of creative fiction certain trends and themes emerge as the number of works increases over time. One can find examples of such conventions in the above mentioned anthologies and creative fiction. Through my research I have regularly come across a number of them; the is-she-or-isn't-she-a-dyke narrative of wonder and seduction, the one-night-stand-who-became-the-girlfriend tale, the butch flip story of unexpected role reversals, and the transgression of sexual boundaries tale of dyke with fag (gay man), to name but a few. As Taormino explains, "The very existence of such conventions

suggests that there is a recognizable (dare I say) canon of lesbian erotic writing with identifiable authors, publishers, and even themes." (1996:10) This noticeable "canon" of dyke sex writing, and in particular SM fiction signals a shift in lesbian creativity; an expanding of the paradigm to include voices that have been either invisible or restricted within lesbian cultural and political communities in the past. However, while this "historical shift" is exciting, "the codification of lesbian erotic writing has produced a known group of writers who, as the primary producers of the most widely accessible lesbian porn, end up in control of defining the discourse and agenda." (10) What then defines the historical moment in which I enter this discourse is a tension between established conventions -- themes, identity constructions and representations, codifications and standards -- the development and expression of new kinds of subjectivities and sexual identities as well as the theoretical frenzy about sexual identity and performativity.

1.1a) MEDIA ARTS REPRESENTATIONS
Influences Within Dyke SM Film and Video Productions

Much as the focus has shifted from sadomasochism in sex writing to genderplay, so too has this transition occurred within independent film and videomaking. In the last few years a number of works have been produced which address notions of gender identification and genderplay within dyke social and sexual practices, and less and less works are being produced which

are cut and dry SM.[10] For example, within the realm of works dealing with lesbian sex and sexuality programmed in the Image & Nation festival (Montréal's International Lesbian and Gay Film & Video Festival) a clear shift is evident.[11]

In reviewing the programming over the past four years, there seems to be a clear break from previously quite sexually explicit work to pieces addressing gender categorization; a widespread shift from work exploring and representing sexual practices, in particular the SM practices to that which considers sexuality in relation to gender, gender ambiguity, and full on gender bending. For example, while much of the work at the 1995 festival included, if not centered around images of lesbian sadomasochistic play, for example dungeon scenes, scenes of SM and BD play, overtly fantasmatic representations of sex and finally more reality-based documentary styled representations of self-identified SM and leather dykes, the 1996 festival was void of such.[12] In surveying the programming of the 1996 and 1997 Image &

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[10] Though for the most part I am referring to what I see as trends within independent media artworks (film and video productions) produced in North America over the last four years (1996-1999) there have been a small number of international titles which follow these shifts, notably works coming out of the U.K. and Australia (for example the 1996 *Sexing the Label: Love and Gender in a Queer World* and the more recent 1998 *Pansexual Public Porn*).

[11] Given my intimate knowledge of the Image & Nation festival as the Director of Programming, I am specifically referencing the shifts in the focus of mediaworks that I have seen at this local (Montréal) event. However, throughout the international lesbian and gay film festival circuit these shifts in issue paradigms are also obvious as most of the international titles of any given year often make the "festival rounds".

[12] Examples of such sexually explicity works are Maria Beatty's work, *A Lot of Fun for the Evil One* (1994) *The Elegant Spanking* (1994) and *The Black Glove* (1996) which is illustrative in that she incorporates fantasy scenes (i.e. the maid and the mistress) into highly explicit and hardcore SM play -- representing bondage, flogging, water sports, foot fetishism,

Nation festival it becomes evident that works contemplating issues of sexuality

and identity foreground gender and the problematics of its construction and

practice within lesbianism; placing it at the centre of such sexual

investigations. Most illustrative is the 1996 programme titled "On a Gender

Bender" in that this represented the first time that an entire shorts programme

could be composed of gender-interrogating or exploring titles.[13]

The 1998 and most recent 1999 Festival articulate these plays with identity,

sexuality and gender fluidity, to more fully investigate and represent

transgenderism and transsexualism.[14] Three videos by American self-described

"Tranny" Christopher Lee, *Trappings of Transhood* (1998), *Alley of the Tranny*

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and mummification.   Other examples are Kadet Kuhne's *Fuck Film*
(1995), *You Little Devil* (1994) and *Impact Zone* (1996).   In addition to
these films and videos is a feature length documentary by Michelle
Handelman, titled *BloodSisters* (1995) that explores the U.S. SM and
leather dyke world and includes interviews with noted writers Pat
Califia, Robin Sweeney and Wickie Stamps.   This film is notable in that
it is the first such documentary and stands as a good illustration of the
focus (or obsession?) with SM and other sexually explicit
representations that existed within lesbian film and video making in
1994 and 1995 (DGLQ, 1995 *Image & Nation gaie et lesbienne. Festival
international de cinéma et de vidéo de Montréal* catalogue).

[13] For example, *Houdiniana* (1996) by Margaret Long, Hope Thompson's
Crossing the Line (1996),   the clay-mation short *Adam* (Andrea Stoops,
1995), *Male Identified* (1996) by Venae Rodrigez and finally the
documentary *Shinjuku Boys* (Kim Longinotto and Jan Williams, 1996)
which explores the worlds of three drag kings in Tokyo (DGLQ, 1996
*Image & Nation gaie et lesbienne. Festival international de cinéma et de
vidéo de Montréal* catalogue).

[14] The titles I am referencing are: *Transmission* (1998) by Ivan E. Coyote,
Tranzinfo (1997) by Cat Grant and Boyd Kodak, noted transgendered
photographer, Del Lagrace Vocano's *Panssexual Public Porn* (1998),
Hans' New Film by Lucia Davis (1998) and Rosa Von Praunheim's 1996
Transsexual Menace included in Image & Nation 1998 as well as the
1999 *Gendernauts* by Monica Treut (DGLQ, 1998, 1999 *Image & Nation
gaie et lesbienne. Festival international de cinéma et de vidéo de
Montréal* catalogues).

Boys (1998), toted as "the first Tranny porn produced" and the 1999 *Sex Flesh and Blood*, serve as examples of an interesting ending (aptly at the end of the millennium) to a sexual trajectory that begun perhaps with the challenging publication of *Coming to Power* two decades ago. Not only do these works have a place within lesbian and gay film festivals, but as an indication of their abundance, a San Fransisco three-day transgender and transsexual film and video festival called TrannyFest has been up and running for three years as has the London International Transgender Film Festival. These festivals stand as a marker of the very real changes within not only queer cultural communities with respect to the visible and ever-growing presence of transgendered and transsexual peoples, but the widening of queer discourses (intellectual, political and cultural) to include issues of gender and sexual identities.

These trends within lesbian productions reflect the larger paradigm shifts within the discourses surrounding lesbian sexual identities and practices; the widening of the issue spectrum within all spheres of creative production -- from intellectual (scholarly) work to literary (creative writing) work, and finally shifts within lesbian independent film and videomaking. An excellent example of this interrelationship rests with Michelle Handelman's 1995 documentary film *BloodSisters* (included in I&N 1995). Handelman's independent film featured many prominent erotic fiction writers, many of whose work is included in the above mentioned literary anthologies and fiction. For example, the writers Robin Sweeney, Pat Califia, Tala Brandeis and Wickie Stamps, among others.

1.2 DYKE SM THEORIES
Intellectual Discourses

Theorizing this newly cast dyke SM sexuality offers many pleasures while the activity simultaneously poses some dangerous challenges. Speaking and writing about one's sexuality is an inherently problematic activity. As Mariana Valverde explains in *Sex, Power and Pleasure*:

> Talking sex is a problematic activity, and not just because of modesty and repression. "Talking sex" is a myth: or more accurately, an act of creating a fiction... If sex is repressed, that is condemned to prohibition, nonexistence and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. (1987:23)

For the most part the intellectual literature on lesbian sadomasochism employs psychoanalytic theories to explore and interrogate these sociosexual practices and representations. An obvious example is Parveen Adams' article "Of Female Bondage" (1989) in which she employs Freud's theory of sexuality to speak of the "new sexuality" of lesbian sadomasochism. Adams lays out Freud's analyses of feminine sexuality -- from the Oedipus complex, to the perverse processes of disavowal, fetishism and masochism[15] -- in order to theorize the psychical position of the contemporary lesbian sadomasochist. As well, Adams draws upon the works of Gilles Deleuze, Joyce McDougall and Jean Clavreul to more fully articulate her SM lesbian in relationship to masochism and the process of disavowal as well as flushing out further the

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[15] Adams specifically uses Freud's studies of masochism, fetishism and perversion;"A Child is Being Beaten" (1919), "Fetishism" (1927) and "The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence" (1940).

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notion of fetishism in relationship to her. This analysis offers an emancipatory picture of the lesbian sadomasochism as a figure refusing to "operate within the space of masculine and feminine choices," therefore separating sexuality from gender and enacting "differences in the theatre where roles freely circulate". (264)

Thus, as Mandy Merck summarizes for us in "Feminist Ethics of SM", Adams' new sexuality is a slippery and smart identity that plays with the terms of desire. Merck explains that:

> Lesbian s/m literature is read to describe a practice of 'choice', 'mobility', consent', and 'satisfaction': 'a play with identity and a play with genitality'. The power of the maternal phallus is eluded, and the paternal phallus which rules the male masochist functions as the object neither of desire nor of identification. With it, femininity and its discontents are left behind - hence Adams's conclusion that the lesbian sadomasochist, while undoubtedly perverse, escapes the pathology which besets her sex. (1993: 242-43)

Within this theatre of sexual roles and gender identifications, Judith Butler's (1990) theorization of gender performativity finds an intriguing place. In connection with gender as play is also an interesting linkage with the discursive practices of naming and performativity.[16]

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[16] A more thorough analysis of perfomance and performativity will be explored fully in the next two chapters of this thesis. I bring the concept up here as an introduction to the issues, though I am aware of the crucial need for extensive description..

In this sense, as Waugh coherently explains:

> The term *performative*, deriving from the first sense of the word
> (performance: the execution of an action) and borrowed from speech act
> linguistics, defines a category of utterance that executes, enacts, or
> performs the action that is uttered, for example. *I apologize, I sentence, I*
> *welcome, or the I do* of the marriage ceremony. Hence Judith Butler's theory
> that "gender reality is created through sustained social performances", that
> maleness and femaleness are "performative in the sense that the essence or
> identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications
> manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive
> means." (1997:110)

Though not entirely embedded within psychoanalytic theory, the concept of
performativity is inextricably linked to it. In consideration of a dyke SM
identity this notion is very demonstrative; the sadomasochistic lesbian is, in
theory, acting out many roles (perhaps as many as she chooses) in that
"theatre" of sexual perversity. The roles of the daddy/boy, the femme/butch
and even the top/bottom, adhere to this performative prescription.

Unlike Adams' "playful perverts" who try on roles in an amusing theatre of
sexuality, Julia Creet (1991) theorizes an SM lesbian that functions as an
unsatisfied and rebellious daughter to "symbolic mother" feminism. Rather
than abide by the Law of the Father, Creet asserts it is "maternal authority
which is consciously transgressed". Thus "the Law of the Father ('woman' as
lack) is 'distanced' in favour of the Law of the Mother ('woman' as morally
superior)." (253) Creet theorizes that this rebellion against the moral codes of

feminism can be seen as symbolically a transgression against a symbolic feminist Mother. Within this theoretical framework the SM dyke is waging a kind of "daughter's revolt" against feminism. As she asserts, "Any recognition of the desire to dominate and the desire to be submissive has been pronounced 'politically incorrect' " and thus prompting rebellion. (1991:155) Therefore in Califia's story "The Hustler" upon which Creet hinges her analysis, Noh Mann's anger is towards a symbolic mother who cannot deliver punishment but rather guilt and in turn recognizes this rivalry as merely "sisterhood." (155)

Creet reconfigures the terms of the feminist discourse surrounding SM and asks not whether this practice is politically feminist, but rather how feminism functions within the "economy of a lesbian s/m fantasy". In other words, Creet seeks to uncover "the relations of power and desire embedded in, and produced by a written story of lesbian s/m fantasy" which, she argues, is "itself (both) embedded in and producing feminist discourse." (136) Considering feminist discourses as inextricably fused into the lesbian SM fantasy, it is useful to adopt Merck's suggestions that feminism can be seen as the "slash" between the "S" and the "M" of dyke sadomasochism. As she states; "S/M suggests opposition without fixed content, content which the appropriately termed 'slash' both stands in for and cuts out. In the case of lesbian s/m, one compelling question is how feminism has read this opposition, how it has, in effect, read itself into it." (237) This theoretical perspective and academic strategy responds to (and thus is in discourse with)

contemporary lesbian SM sex writing. This demonstrates the interrelationship and interreferential nature of the two productive practices.

Tania Modleski also relies on fictional examples in her *Feminism Without Women* (1991). Unlike Creet's "symbolic mother" which ultimately will not lay down the law and "relieve the guilt and desire of the s/m fantasy", Modleski theorizes such a "mother" as a figure which initiates the daughter into the symbolic order while providing a critical frame of female reference and affirmation. In other words, the "maternal dominatrix" introduces the woman to the "disciplines of patriarchy" but transfers and transforms that "patriarchal system of gender inequities into a realm of difference presided over by women." (Merck, 1993:254)

Finally, Merck (1993) offers an insightful and useful comparison of Adams, Creet and Modleski, outlining what she calls the "three psychologies of lesbian s/m". As Merck describes these, there is:

> Adams', which absolves it from the inequities of both gender (the paternal phallus) and generation (maternal authority); Creet's, which emphasizes maternal authority as the conscious focus of both desire and disappointment; and Modleski's, which counterposes maternal authority to the gender system it both transmits and contests. (254)

Merck intelligently critiques these theorists on their own terms offering an overview of some of the major analyses of SM fantasy fiction and practice through the lens of psychoanalysis. As well, she also raises the issue of ethics within the discourse(s) of feminism and SM, illustrating the occupation with morality within these two seemingly contradictory realms. Merck asserts that

the basis for all challenges to a so-called ethics of feminism, or feminist morality is an insistence on "speak(ing) from desire (what I want for us) rather than identity (who I am)". (264)

1.3 LIMITATIONS
Perfect Theories and Perfect Spaces?

Sherry Turkle, in *Life on the Screen* (1995) argues that the Internet creates a new sense of identity that is "de-centred and multiple." (268) Within the "virtual intimacy" that is allowed in chatrooms and other communication spaces on the Internet, Turkle purports that "you are who you pretend to be" and that within this "culture of simulation" what emerges is a positive multi-self identity. As she describes, "The culture of simulation may help us achieve a vision of a multiple but integrated identity whose flexibility, resilience and capacity for joy comes from having access to our many selves." (268) As the SM dyke is theorized as "enacting differences in a theatre where roles freely circulate" and thus can be assumed, altered, created and reconfigured, in this "intimate" space of virtuality, the sky must be the limit. However, there are limitations.

What is similar between the theorization of SM identity within the virtual space and the psychoanalytic space is that they are both surprisingly idealistic. In other words, SM becomes some sort of a perfection of both sexuality and identity within the psychoanalytic literature discussed. In many ways this perfection has very little to do with the constraints of the real world of living,

loving and identifying (culturally and politically). If "gender exists at the level of discourse," it ignores, as Edwards contests, its significance as an "institutionalized social practice." As he states, "identities (gendered and otherwise) do not express some authentic inner core of self but are the dramatic effect of our performances." (1997: 478)

Mediated spaces such as the chatroom and email correspondence, as I explore in Chapter Two, are also sites wholly entrenched in the complexity (and promise) of ideal characteristics of "perfect" interactions and "perfect" relations. While on the Net one is able to become whomever or whatever one chooses, creating a perfection in a sense of identity and sexuality. Therefore, within this virtually intimate space one is able to be more than "all that they can be" or less than they can be or perhaps simply different from what they are.

Also, the virtual environment has other kinds of problematic limitations. These communication practices can be seen as the practices of a community of sorts, often called an on-line community. These practices share much with 18th and 19th century salon or café culture in that they both are to a degree "idle" and "gossipy" communication sites. As well, the on-line chat community, like its earlier café incarnation, has developed with a set of codes of behaviour (netiquette) that, if transgressed, result in virtual excommunication (ignoring, punting, sinkholing[17]). Much as a café goer who did not adhere to the codes of

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[17] As I discuss in much more depth in Chapter Three, these forms of virtual excommunication are both jarring and severe, definitely serving their purpose.

gossip (how far one could go in criticism of another, etc.) was effectively ignored and thus not welcomed back, a member of a chat who does not adhere to the rules of the room is also given a strong message to go away and not return. As I engage in more fully in Chapter Three, these rules of conduct become more acute when coupled with the already established sets of codes, modes and styles of behaviour within dyke SM sociosexual practices. As locations purported to be encouraging fluid and multiple sexual identities, SM chatrooms are also fraught with conditions for participation and membership. What then emerges through these community configurations are at times new methods of social surveillance and control.

Much as theories project a degree of ideal perfection, so too do these virtual spaces promote a concept of free and fluid communication. Chatting and emailing do open up new avenues for sexual interaction and fantasy production, as I will examine in the next chapter. However, while providing new spaces within which to interrogate the dyke SM fantasy, codes of behaviour and surveillance within the on-line environment pose restrictive challenges to such constructions.

From playful fluidity to inforcement of codes and behaviours, the promises and the disappointments of sexual interaction via new communication technologies and virtual environments produce a wealth of material with which to interrogate the production of the dyke SM fantasy. In the next two chapters I will explore this terrain, hoping to glean from these erotic locations material

with which to give insight into the erotic interplay of sexual subjectivities and identifications formed at the intersection of fantasy and mediation.

CHAPTER TWO
SEXUAL SITES AND EROTIC LOCATIONS

Location is not a listing of adjectives or assignment of labels such as race,
sex and class. Location is not the concrete to the abstract of
decontextualization. Location is the always partial, always finite, always
fraught play of foreground and background, text and context that constitutes
critical inquiry. Above all, location is not self evident or transparent.
(Haraway:1997, 37)

The Internet, with its almost infinitely numbered sites for sexual interaction,
exploration and exchange, offers the erotic locations for creation of the dyke
SM fantasy. Much as Haraway explains, these erotic locations -- chatrooms and
email correspondence -- are elusive and slippery, offering a foreground and a
background to the dyke SM fantasy while at the same time functioning as both
problematic and constrictive. Brimming with erotic potential for the creative
construction of multiple sexual and gender subjectivities and perspectives,
these locations become the very sites wherein which to negotiate the challenges
of such identies.

In this chapter I will provide both a critical map and personal travelogue
through these locales of sexual communication. Drawing upon my research of
the practices of chatting and emailing, I will take the reader on a descriptive
journey through the murky territories of sexually-based chatrooms and erotically
charged email correspondence to flush out the performative nature of these
practices as well as uncovering the patterns that emerge through such sexual
play on-line. With the creation of virtual avatars or alternate sexual and gender

positions and perspectives within chatrooms and through email, the erotic

multiplicity and fluidity of sexual/gender identities within the dyke SM fantasy

are also more clearly articulated and opened up for re-presentation and re-

contextualization. As sites for sexual interaction, these cyber locations

provide new and refreshing avenues for erotic discourse and explorative sexual

adventures in the quest for dyke SM fantasy fulfillment.

2.1. CHATTING ON-LINE
Talking Sex Through AOL

Many people who engage in netsex say that they are constantly surprised by
how emotionally and physically powerful it can be. They insist that it
demonstrates the truth of the adage that 90% of sex takes place in the
mind. (Turkle:1995, 21)

Work there, play there, love there -- but if you have sex in cyberspace, be
sure to always use a modem. (Stone:1995, 405)

Virtual sex play on the Internet, more commonly called "cybersex" or "netsex"

can take many forms -- from on-line chatrooms[18] to MUDS[19], to one-on-one IM[20]

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[18] A chatroom is a conversationally-based on-line environment in which
chatters communicate with one another in a predetermined space.
Chatrooms are usually centered around a particular theme or subject,
although like any conversation, quite often discourses do go quite
beyond such proposed limitations.

[19] MUDs, commonly referred to as "Multi-User Dungeons" or more
recently as "Multi-User Domains" are described by Amy Bruckman as
"text-based multi-user virtual-reality environment(s). The original MUDs
were adventure games, however, the technology has been adapted to a
variety of purposes."("Gender Swapping on the Internet"
cc.gatech.edu/fac/Amy.Bruckman/papers).

sessions. Within the realm of on-line chatrooms, and specifically the chatrooms available through the America On-line (hereafter referred to by its acronym AOL[21]) Internet service, where I will locate my explorations, more than half of the rooms available to members are for the sole purpose of sexual interaction. Often explicitly titled with witty sexual overtones, it is not difficult to find a venue for sexual conversation within the AOL member rooms. As well, while often not overtly described as such, there are many other rooms that are also available for playing, though masked as simply "chatting" venues. Although AOL publicly promotes itself as a family-oriented Internet community, it is not surprising that there are so many possibilities for sexual (and thus certainly not wholesome "family") fun. Apart from very obvious preoccupations with sex and sexuality within (mainstream) society, there are other concrete reasons that contribute to this. As AOL positions itself as a "user-friendly" on-line environment -- through both the ease with which one is able to obtain the software (and included free on-line trial time) as well as the simplicity of

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[20] IM (instant message) or IMing describes the practice of personal communication which stems from either a MUD or a chatroom. While in a chatroom, a small screen will appear with a message from a member of that room, accompanied by a notification sound. The receiver can then either choose to engage in a private one-on-one conversation with that chatter or to ignore the message and/or all other messages from the chatter. The ignore function is particularly useful when one finds themselves hounded repeatedly by unwanted Ims.

[21] As the largest and most global of on-line service providers, AOL provides an ideal research environment. According to a Feb. 2, 2000 press release, AOL has surpassed the 21 million member mark, an increase of 12 million over a three year period (from 9 million as listed in a similar press release dated Sept. 2, 1997). AOL Keyword: Press: press_view.cfm.

navigation within the AOL "On-line Community" -- it is not surprising that this service houses so very many outlets for sexual communication. [22]

When an AOL member enters the "People Connection" area, a list of chat rooms -- both public rooms (those created and mediated by AOL staff) and private or member rooms (created and moderated by members) -- appears from which to make your chatting selection. [23]   From this first general screen, the user chooses the topic-area they wish to chat in as well as the specific chatroom they wish to go to. [24]   For the most part, the chatrooms specifically devoted to sexual and particularly SM themes are found under the topic-area "Special Interests." With such explicit chatroom titles as: DomSubDiscussion, F4FRoleplay, MasterF4SubF, FDomme4FSub, F4FUnusualDesires, SubF4Bizarre, etc., there is little guess work needed to find the space(s) and specifically themed areas within which to engage or to play. Unlike other forms of cyber-relating, like listserves, email correspondence and overtly sexual Web

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[22] Through my (surely non-scientific) calculations on one Wednesday evening (the purported most active chat night of the week), I counted close to half of the chatroom titles being sexual or at least sexually suggestive in nature.   These findings are echoed by Hammon in his research, as he similarly states that "Almost half of the member created chat rooms on AOL have names that can be considered to be sex or cybersex related." (Robin Hammon 1996 cybersoc.com:1)

[23] It is very interesting to note the naming practices used by AOL to designate the areas of the on-line service.   As a service primarily geared towards "family use" these titles reflect this ideology.

[24] At the time of this writing, these categories (which are the same for both public and member rooms) in the order they are listed are: Canada, UK, France, Germany, Town Square, Arts & Entertainment, Friends, Life, Places, News, Sports & Finance, Romance, Special Interests, Japan, Australia, Made in Hong Kong and AOL Brazil.   Much can be said for the inherent "values" demonstrated through this hierarchy, and therefore what the "family-oriented" AOL service deems to be appropriate areas for conversation, but that is food for another thesis indeed.

sites (which of course one can only enter after paying an often astronomical membership fee)[25], what is most appealing about these on-line chatrooms is that they function in real time (and as such are often referred to as IRCs or Internet Relay Chats) and therefore function to create what is closest to RL (real life) discussions or interactions. As such, chatting is the closest thing to RL sexual involvement available on the Internet and certainly the simplest virtual location within which one can find "sexual" gratification. The kinds of gratification one can hope to achieve are contingent upon the ways in which "players" or "chatters" engage with one another within the chatroom space. From innocent flirting to more aggressively overt sexual talk, these modes of communication dictate the conversational flavour of the room and vary greatly from chatroom to chatroom.

According to Robin Hammon, there are two identifiable modes of cybersex occurring simultaneously in any given sexually-based chatroom. The first, he claims, is "computer mediated interactive masturbation in real time." As he explains, "in this form of cybersex, users type instructions and descriptions of

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[25] These websites are not difficult to locate on the Net as anyone who has entered even a slightly sexually suggestive chatroom will tell you. After one has left their "virtual fingerprint" in a chatroom, they are constantly in receipt of sex site junk email (with titles like "Hot Teens" "Barely Legal Fun" etc.). Also, I have found over the course of my 3 years of research that increasingly individuals are taking the creation of sexual websites into their own hands by erecting home pages which contain "obscene" materials (naked pictures of themselves, erotic stories, etc.). Though somewhat beyond the scope of this thesis, this practice is very interesting in that these home pages are active self-creations and representations of sexual identity(ies). This is echoed by Turkle as she states, "Home pages are one recent and dramatic illustration of net notions of identity as multiple yet coherent."(1995: 259)

what they are 'doing' to each other and to themselves while masturbating. They often type using one hand while masturbating with the other."[26] The second form of cybersex, as Hammon continues, is the "computer mediated telling of interactive sexual stories (in real time) with the intent of arousal. In this form users tell each other sexual stories on-line with the intent of arousing themselves and other users."[27]

While these definitions are useful in developing a framework with which to describe such kinds of interaction, Hammon's two forms are limiting when applied to a dyke SM chatting context in that they do not take into consideration the often very highly arousing (almost) sexual play which takes place somewhere in between these two interactive positions. Within sexually-based conversational chatrooms on AOL, for the most part the participants are straight rather than queer, which I believe does strongly affect the flavour of conversation occurring within them. More specifically, it seems that dyke chatting goes beyond the territory of the screen. For example, it is less likely that a dyke would enter and engage in chatroom dialogue whilst actively (physically) masturbating. Rather, she would most likely engage in what Hammon described as the second form of cybersex, or perhaps in a wholly different form of sexual interaction altogether. In my experience this form of

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[26] As Turkle suggests in her definition of real time cybersex, this practice involves "people typing messages with erotic content to each other, sometimes with one hand on the keyset sometimes with two". (1995: 21) As well, as quoted in Hammon, Nguyen and Alexander state that cybersex of the two types defined above is satisfying enough that it can often "evoke physical orgasm" in the participants. (cybersoc.com:2)

[27] www.cybersoc.com: 2

sexual interaction on-line takes more the form of sexual banter than it does a mutual engagement in sexy story-telling or (cyber)masturbation. This form of sexual interaction, I believe, occupies a position somewhere between the two methods outlined by Hammon, a position as it were of "inbetweenness" -- simultaneously psychically masturbatory (getting off in your mind, or creating fantasy) and storytelling in nature (the sharing of these fantasies). I believe that this inbetweenness exists particularly within dyke Internet interactions and in many ways adds to (if not wholly informs) these dyke types of sexual on-line relationships.[28].

Much the same ways as sexual and quasi-sexual interactions within dyke sociosexual locations (at bars, at the bookstore, on the street) involve particularly unique forms of verbal and physical communication techniques (how we greet one another, how we flirt with one another, etc.), on-line chatting relies on a similar subcultural vernacular. Through these forms of parlance -- the choices of vocabulary and the names we call each other -- dyke on-line sex chatting is most often less about coming to arousal (or orgasm) as it is about collectively and playfully arousing one another within the chatroom.[29] As is

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[28] As performative, a dyke positioning on-line is quite often adopted by straight men. Toted as one of the most uncomfortable occurances for dyke members of these chatrooms, this "false lesbian syndrome" is a practice adopted by men in hopes of having a sexual encounter with a woman *as* a woman.

[29] While I do find it somewhat hard to believe, some dyke chatters do insist that they engage in a large amount of sexual self-gratification. For example, as Gloria Brame discovered in her research, one chatter, "Jade", confessed, "I'm lesbian and it's a little tricky, in my situation to have much of a social life. But I have had good luck finding great women to chat with on-line and I *definitely* make the most of the

illustrated in this chatroom discussion, dyke chatting often remains both

suggestive and playful, combining sexual nuance with witty repartee;

```
Gameluvr:      hey...did you know i learned how to masturbate watching "the karate kid"?
PeachyPooo:    lol
KNOBPLAYER: how?
Kristini23:    really?
PeachyPooo:    i wont even ask
Gameluvr:      you remember..."rub on...rub off....rub on...rub off..."
KNOBPLAYER: lol
Kristini23:    lol
Grrliepuss:    cool...was it the rub on or rub off?
Gameluvr:      actually, the combination...
Gameluvr:      but sometimes it is fun to mix it up...rub off, then rub on...
Grrliepuss:    yeah......mix n' match...like choosing candy at the
supermarket..................................
Gameluvr:      i like to close my eyes, then surprise myself...will i rub on, or off this time???
PonyExp100:    rubbing is fine...but you need to buff to perfect the system...LOL
```

Also, within dyke SM chatrooms very often the talk revolves around

discussions of practices and techniques involved in SM play, and from there

subtle sexual dialogue ensues through the excitement and titillation

of sharing this information and exploring issues inherent within these

practices. From this shared discursive base, chatting among dykes within

these specific chatrooms can range from bondage and whipping how-to lessons

to more codified dialogue of SM roles and positions to plays of gender. It is

within this second kind of chatting that the performative essence of dyke SM

chatting becomes most evident, and for the purposes of this thesis, of most

theoretical use.

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cybersex. I keep a vibrator by my desk and a few other toys, like nipple
clips and ankle cuffs. Just in case." However, much more believable is
another of Brame's subjects "Domme4U" who confided that although
she didn't feel physically aroused *while* she was dominating on-line, she
claims that it "certainly gives (her) something more interesting than the
bills to think about when (she) goes to bed". (Gloria Brame "How to
Have Cybersex: Boot Up and Turn On"gloria-brame.com/erotica.htm)

As the virtual world -- particularly within the practice of chatting -- functions through description (of one's subjectivity, one's identity, one's SM positioning) rather than demonstration (of such signifiers through physical gesture and other RL signs) Turkle's adage "you are who you pretend to be" is easily recognized within a chatroom space. As all chatters are represented solely through textual means (the typed words on their computer screen) it is possible to enact any role or position without the potential hindrances of visual codes and gestures inherent in live interactions. Within the chat space it is therefore possible to occupy any position within SM dyads, any gender and any subjectivity with an almost unlimited bank of variances, fancies or desires. For example, as my on-line avatar "Girliepuss," I could potentially chat or play from the position of a femme bottom, a femme top, a boy, a Daddy or perhaps a butch. Whichever role I assume within a given chatroom, under which screen name and with what text I type on my keyboard dictates the manner with which I will be regarded or read by other participants in the room. Therefore, as a performance of a chosen SM position or gender, chatting allows for (at least) textual entry into otherwise inaccessible subjectivities and perspectives.

With textual clues the only method of advertizing or representing sexual subjectivities and positionings, the chatroom environment becomes a virtual performance of sexuality and gender within the dyke SM fantasy. Butler asserts that gender (and I would add SM sexual positionings) is a "style of the flesh" and as such is a "corporeal style" or "act... which is both intentional and

performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning". (139) These dramatic constructions of meaning, these "acts", find a wonderfully ripe terrain within the chatroom space.

As sometimes subtle, sometimes full-blown sexual conversations, chatting on-line produces challenging explorations and plays with characterization in the form of creating avatars (or alternate identities) and virtual gender-bending. For example, a chatter can design as many on-line subjectivities as she chooses, from a pool of possibilities limited only by her imagination, allowing for the adoption and enacting of many identities, many perspectives, many genders as well as many sexual scenarios. Given this potential for the creation of a multiple and flexible self, the SM dyke not only re-casts and re-presents herself (almost) infinitely but does so without the material constraints afforded in RL. Perhaps styles of the "fantastic" rather than styles of the flesh, virtual gender-bending and acting through on-line avatars are performances that while discursively fixed produce and inhabit SM fantasy spaces. As a venue for a potentially limitless interplay of fantasy and identity construction, the chatroom not only provides a location for sexual engagement but also for explorations unavailable within the material world.

For example in this chat, I, as "Girliepuss", a high femme, engage with "MastrDyk", a self-described "rough n' tumble kinda guy with a soft side" in a play of assumed positionings acted out through an innocent dance along with others in the chatroom:

MastrDyk:	ok... who wants to dance w/Mastr
RowdeeBoy:	:: thinking this cyber stuff is interesting not at all like real stuff :::
MaitrsNuit:	:::holdiong Avida by the waist and watching Her upper body sweep the floor gracefully::
MstrsInMD:	::::hip to hip with Cougar::::
MastrDyk::	Puss... let's go:::walking towards sweetie.. May I have this dance??
MaitrsNuit:	::pulling Her up and drawing Her close and swaying hips::::
MastrDyk::	::::::::::the dance turns quite sensual and steamy::::
Grrliepuss:	:::::standing up::pulling down much too short skirt :::shyly walking towards mastr::heels clicking on the floor::
LadyAvida:	Bi..join me for a slow dance??
Grrliepuss:	:::::ohhhh shyly taking mastrdyk's strong hand::::
MastrDyk::	twirls Grrlie onto the floor::notices her ass barely covered by the small skirt::getting harder
LadyAvida:	Grabs Nuit..lets do a slow one
MastrDyk:	then draws her close and dips her
Grrliepuss:	:::::feeling her heart beat faster::
Grrliepuss:	mastrdyk has such big & strong & gorgeous hands
LadyAvida:	Puts my hands on Nuits ass
Grrliepuss:	goodness, such lewd and crude behaviour
MaitrsNuit:	mmmmmmmm
Grrliepuss:	:::::feeling his arms holding her tightly::::::
MastrDyk:	::holds Grrlie close, one broad hand at the small of her back
MastrDyk:	the other holding her hand
Grrliepuss:	:::::shivering slightly::::::
MaitrsNuit:	:::swaying it to the beat:::
MastrDyk:	::dips Grrlie again, and kisses her stomache as she leans back::
MstrsInMD:	:::::::grabs Cougar's hand again, and spins her into my arms::::::
LadyAvida:	placing hands on her waist
MstrsInMD:	::::::::::kissing Cougar's tummy in the DIP::::::::::
Grrliepuss:	:::feels the butterflies all tied up in her stomach as its kissed::::
MastrDyk:	holding Grrlie by the waist and making her hips match mine w/ every beat:::harder still:::
BiXxxtasy:	<---feeling nipples get a bit hard
LadyAvida:	Gives bi a long slow lingering kiss
MaitrsNuit:	:::raising head off the floor and gyrating My body back upright:::
Grrliepuss:	pushing ever so slightly (but firmly) against mastr's powerful hips
LadyAvida:	Swaying our hips together
MastrDyk:	bumping and grinding and sinking lower and lower onto the floor
Grrliepuss:	moving quicker and faster with the growing rhythm
LadyAvida:	Puts Bi in a deep dip
BiXxxtasy:	feeling myself get lost in Lady's touch
MaitrsNuit:	I'm going to faint in a minute

While this chat represents less of a sexual scene than perhaps a romantic moment, it does demonstrate how powerful such adoptions of characters can be to create an almost seamless scenario of a butch/femme interaction even though potentially neither I nor my dance partner, MastrDyk, occupy any such positioning like these avatars in our real lives.

In her discussion of butch/femme identities, Butler states that, "the play of masculine and feminine, as well as the inversion of ground to figure can constitute a highly complex and structured production of desire... In both butch and femme identities, the very notion of an original or natural identity is put into question; indeed it is precisely that question as it is embodied in these identities that becomes one source of their erotic significance." (123) Therefore, if this acting out of butch and femme roles functions to destabilize both "terms as they come into erotic interplay" within the real (RL), this virtual performance illustrated through the chat introduces yet another layer of rearticulation and recontextualization to not only destabilize such terms of masculinity and femininity but to expose these roles as excessive and highly malleable.

2.1a) SCREEN NAMES AND PROFILES
The Making of Dyke SM Avatars

What do you do when your imaginary playmate makes better friends than you do? Sandy Stone (1995)

Functioning as a chatter's "calling card", screen names and member profiles lay the groundwork for pointed and specific chatting as well as entice others for the more intimate chatting practice of IMing. The practice of naming, or choosing and developing a screen name is a crucial aspect of on-line play. As the first signifier of one's on-line identity upon entry to a chatroom, a screen or member name has a few functions. One is encouraged to choose a screen

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name that refers to or describes a chatter's sexual likes and dislikes and their perspectives within SM dyads and gender positioning.

As the first impression of a chatter that members read, screen names introduce one's on-line "personality" to the rest of the room. Employing a mixture of dyke vernaculars and chatroom idioms these names can range from cleverly coy to overtly (sexually) descriptive. For example, in a recent foray into the chatroom FDomme4FSub some of the chatters I encountered had signed on with names like: sneakyboi, Mistress Helga, MasterDyk, mightyabusive and MistrsSilvr. With such coy (and not so coy) chatroom handles, the SM and gender positionings of these chatters become blatantly obvious to all who come into the room, and as such operate as both filters and inciters for the particular kinds of (sexual) interactions each chatter wishes (or does not wish) to partake in while in the chatroom.

Further, as a chatter may have a number of different screen names, multiple subjectivities may be assumed for as many chatroom forays as one wishes. This ease of assuming chatroom avatars allows for intriguing explorations of SM and gender perspectives within the dyke SM fantasy; acting roles and positionings on each side of the sadomasochistic dyad, from locations along the gender divide and beyond into new (virtual) territories of identification and subjectivity. Through this potentially ever (re)cycling play of nominative acts and identity performances the very essence of such roles as both easily reconfigured and reconstructed is playfully uncovered. Thus, as Turkle reminds

us, "identity is a set of roles that can be mixed and matched (and whose) demands (can perpetually) be negotiated." (180)

As well, these names also operate as a form of codification in a more widespread fashion in that they make the chatter locatable on the AOL chat network through what is called a "member name search". Through this locator function the searcher can find where the specific chatter is (in which chatroom), if they are on-line at all and from there IM or even send an email to the desired member. Also, through this same search function a chatter can call up other like-minded chatters through specific word searches. For example, if I type in the words *master, boy* (or boi as is the current dyke SM on-line incarnation), *mistress* or other such descriptive terms, I will be given a list of all AOL members with these words in their screen names, making finding compatible players all the more simple.

As another textual performance screen names tersely encapsulate a chatter's sexual and gender identity with a no-nonsense summarization of all aspects of their virtual subjectivit(ies), thus, creating a blurring between identities and content, or between who and what. These performances, or acts of naming constitute SM and gender identities as potentially excessive or, as Butler describes, wholly *incredible*, as she states that " genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. As credible bearers of those attributes however, genders can also be rendered thoroughly and radically incredible." (141)

One of the most crucial elements to assure a productive and positive on-line sexual interaction lies with the composition of a screen name profile. A profile is a textual description of a chatter's on-line persona that is accessible to all members in any given chatroom as well as to any chatter logged onto any AOL chat. The process of creating a profile involves completing the predetermined categories supplied by AOL of: name, location, birthdate, sex, marital status, hobbies, occupation and the inclusion of what AOL describes as a "personal quote". What a chatter lists within this profile section is integral to the ways in which they can play and importantly, also who will (and often will not) play with them. If one enters a chatroom without a profile, the chatter is most often ignored or repeatedly asked *where* their profile is and why they have chosen to enter the room without this very key information in place. Much as the codification processes of early SM communities (the hanky code, flagging, leather costuming, etc.), this descriptive list functions as a public statement of one's SM identity, one's positioning (as a top or bottom, a butch or femme, a daddy or a boy/girl) and often which gender one is assuming in the chat.

The styles employed in the creation of profiles are quite varied, however some similarities and trends do emerge upon a closer examination. Some chatters respond to the questions asked of them in a fairly straightforward manner, providing (potentially) actual or accurate personal information (where they live, their birthdate, etc.) in often SM and dyke vernacular while others use the profile space for personal commentary and enticing sexual parlance.

For example, in the profile below[30], Vixen chooses to simply fill in the requested information in her profile with a little humour and some characteristically *bottom* language:

Member Name:	Candi....or Vixen
Location:	Florida, last time I checked...<Grin>
Birthdate:	12/24~Capricorn!!
Sex:	Female
Marital Status:	So very, very taken!
Hobbies:	A slave to my wonderful wife Tiggrr, BDSM, naturally. I'll try anything twice, and I usually do. Blood, pain, pleasure..it's all the same...
Computer:	Just another thing in life that controls me <shrug> I'm used to it by now.
<grin>	

Similar to Vixen, the profile completed by BrwnEyedBoi remains fairly simple. However, it does go beyond by paying the appropriate homage to what she describes as her mentor, "Sir Crisa", and thus adheres to the codes of Daddy/boy play while also making public her position as a "boi" who is available or "uncollared" at the present:

Member Name:	BrwnEyedBoi
Location:	I'm here.
Birthdate:	the day I was collared
Sex:	Female

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[30] It is important to state here that all the profiles gleaned in my explorations are easily copied while in an on-line chatroom, and as such are certainly not in the realm of "personal" RL information. To even out the playing field, or perhaps to further establish my subjectivity in this research as a participant observer, the profile I most often logged on with during my time exploring these chatrooms is listed below:

Member Name:	Daddy's boy
Location:	just about right here
Birthdate:	January and I love presents
Marital Status:	collared w/ lots of play allowances
Hobbies:	acting up & suffering the consequences
Occupation:	Masters student, topic: playing on-line
Personal Quote:	Gotta love academia in the new millennium

Interestingly, by stating the truth in my aim (as an academic researching such on-line communities) I became very appealing to other chatters, and often engaged in less sexual and more intellectual discussions with other chatters.

Marital Status:	Uncollard and not looking right
Hobbies:	now...Sir Crisa has been my mentor, she has taught me a lot and I look up to her for everything I question.
Computers:	I walk by myself yet I know I am not alone. I don't search, yet I seek.
Occupation:	I can be extremely sassy <grin> but can't most of us Boi's be that way?
Personal Quote:	Any problems with me please contact Sir Crisa until I get my own Mistress....thank you Sir for always being there for me <deep bow>

Further, engaging in what seems to be common plays of queer vernaculars, the profile of "Wildchild" situates this chatter within a dyke SM sexual identity and as such locates "her" within the spectrum of sadomasochistic play:

Member Name:	Wildchild FYI, Iam not a Daddy or a top, but my Daddy is.
Location:	in the state of decadance
Birthdate:	march "93
Sex:	Female
Marital Status:	only for the night
Hobbies:	open to suggestion, IM me at your own risk
Occupation:	queer
Personal Quote:	it is good to be the pervert

And finally, in contrast, other chatters use the profile space provided to describe themselves in ways not keeping with the standard defining questions supplied by AOL. In these instances, the profiles are more like small personal diatribes rather than simply informative lists, and flow through, rather than limit themselves to the categorizations imposed. A good example of this form of profile making is the statement made by one chatter, Ice Cold B*tch, in the chatroom FDomme4FSub:

Member Name:	Ice Cold B*tch
Location:	Welcome to my World
Birthdate:	Timeless
Sex:	Female
Hobbies:	I look into her pain filled eyes, taking a deep cleansing breath. Adrenaline rushes through my veins. Her cries of pain music to my ears. She begs me to stop, yet I push on showing her no mercy. The sound of the whip flying through the air, cracking
Computers:	against her flesh echoes around the room. Her screams turn to soft whimpers, and the pain turns into pleasure.
Occupation:	This moment, this space in time, I am the only thing that matters.
Personal Quote:	Come to me Baby Girl you know you want too.

Thus, the SM and gender performances acted out on-line become more fully rendered through the addition of such profiles. As plays of identity(ies) within the virtual, screen names and the accompanying profiles expose what Butler describes as a "perpetual displacement which constitutes a fluidity of gender (and dyke SM sexual) identities". (138) This fluidity, as illustrated through the creative production of avatars, gender identities and SM positioning within on-line chatroom environments, boldly articulates the potential openness of such terms for re-contextualization and re-presentation within the dyke SM fantasy.

If gender is a copy with no original (Butler) and SM sexual identities can be imagined as the construction of multiple subjectivities which are "tried on like costumes" (Adams), these performances when acted out on-line become more obviously elastic and malleable within this space. And as such offer ideal locations for the exploration(s) of erotic identities, subjectivities and perspectives -- much more so than those attempted in RL.

2.2 EMAIL RELATIONSHIPS
Do-it-Yourself SM Erotic Fiction

Varying in tone and purpose, email relationships can be as simple as exchanging pleasantries with a friend of family member to more complicated (and often convoluted) expressions of desire, love-demands and other such nuisances inherent with interactions of the heart. Often used as a method of taking chatting to another and potentially more intimate level, email dalliances can quite often stem from a connection made between two chatters which weaves its way through the practice of IMing into a more stable and frequent

correspondence. Within the realm of sexual exchange, emailing holds the potential for very interesting plays of both subjectivities and positionings to emerge and act themselves out in a quite distinctly different manner from both chatroom and live one-on-one communications.

From the beginnings of an email flirt through to more explicitly erotic correspondences, an email relationship assumes much different codes of behaviour and communication signs from the ways one interacts in chatrooms or when face to face. First, as a method of personal discourse, emailing most often is a one-on-one affair, rather than a group discussion. Secondly, through the very nature of this communication technology there is a necessary lapse in time, in that responses do not come immediately. With this disconnection between action and reaction it is quite possible to become very intimate very quickly with one's email "friend"; producing a unique interaction between two people always eager for the notification that "you've got mail"[31] to appear when signing on.

Similar to the romantic intrigue of love letter writing of the past, emailing can inspire all the amorous euphoria of longing and anticipation through the

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[31] I use this phrase here both playfully and ironically to reference the Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan uber-romantic comedy *You've Got Mail* (Nora Ephron, 1999). As a straight love story for the cyberage (as well as yet another vehicle for Ephron to appeal to the dissatisfied middle-aged women's market), this film acted as an extensive publicity vehicle for AOL with an advertizing campaign of film tie-ins such as free on-line time offers that were promoted in both the cinema trailer and on AOL itself. I then use this term subversively, knowing that neither the film's producers nor AOL itself would appreciate my usage of the film or the service as both a promotion of and location for such so-called perverted communications.

inherent disjuncture between sending and receiving. Much like chatting, emailing as a somewhat disruptive communication practice opens up the possibilities for plays of identity, subjectivity and gender positionings that are more challenging to explore in our real lives, and as such functions as a quite different relationship than those we have with the people we see and interact with in on a daily basis.

As a narrative performance, emailing is in a sense a style of storytelling, and certainly one of the common activities employed with this communication technology is literally the telling of tales (perhaps with assumed characters, roles and genders). In regarding emailing in this way, the practice is not dissimilar to Robin Hammon's definition of chatting as a form of cybersex in which, as he says, chatters "tell each other sexual stories... with the intent of arousing themselves and other users". (2) However, as email does not take place in real time, such stories can become elaborate narratives with often detailed character development and scenarios.

For example, within one of my email trysts (which I will refer to as my sole email relationship example), one of the most common methods of communicating with one another was strongly narrative in nature, the development of a tale between a boy character named "Jr." and a Daddy called "Cowboy."[32]

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[32]For the purposes of explanation, as well as my readers' pleasure, here is a small snipet of the tale between Jr. and Cowboy, occurring over a week's email correspondence:

On Tue, Mar 17 1998 Jr. wrote:
Jr., feeling the thrill of transgression smiled a smirky smile as cowboy
stood, eyes cast down. Jr. was loving this, his big tough cock-sure
daddy was...was....pouting! He laughed out loud...difficult to contain his
wicked joy....Ive upset my cowboy!!! Just then, he could feel the piercing
anger of mad eyes...looking directly at him...oh oh.....Jr. felt a
tightening in his stomach, his heart pounded fast, his palms wettened.....
oh shit................Jr. cowered slightly.....here it comes.....

On Wed, Mar 18 1998 Cowboy wrote:
The cowboy glaired at the boy, his mind was blank with rage. The little
assholw was fucking laughing, He was LAUGHING!! Oh this simply will
not do. The boy was asking for it this time...no, he wasn't just asking,
he was begging... The cowboy's glare intensified as he slowly removed
his hands from his pockets. He pulled his work gloves from his
waistband and roughly pulled them on. He took a step toward the
boy...whose bravery, whose cockiness dropped away like a snake
shedding its skin. The cowboy grinned...who's laughing now, he
thought to himself. Junior stood, somewhat dumbfounded. "Here boy,
have a smoke," he said and flicked his cigarette down the front of the
boy's shirt. Junior fumbled with his buttons and the cowboy leaned
over and grabbed him by his close-cropped hair. "Leave it," he growled.
"But cowboy!"...the man leaned closer still and ripped the shirt open.
"On fire, are we smart ass?!!" "Burnin' up?!" "Well, you think you are so
damn hot...." "Here, let me help you," he said and drawing the cork out
of his canteen proceeded to dump the cold water on the boy's head.
Junior sputtered and cursed and tried to pull away, but the man gripped
him firmly. "Is that better boy? Or why hell no, not quite, I think I see a
little spark still." The cowboy spat into his hand and rubbed it down
junior's throad, down his chest, down his flat muscular belly...."There,"
he said "I feel soooo much better. "I'm goin' for a ride and well
you...you'd better git cleaned up cause I'm gonna deal with you later.."

On Wed, Mar 18 1998 KatSetzer wrote:
sooo where's this next story of yours??? mmmmmmmmmm??? Now dont
be shy, share with your little boy. YOu know thats how the young learn;
with the capable and helping (smacking) hand of a daddy....and a
cowboy-daddy at that. Dont you be ignoring me justa teach me a lesson
now!!!! I may be a Jr. but I aint no push-over!!!!!
YOu get busy big guy!!!
respectfully yours....welll at least not DISrespctfully,
Jr-boy

On Sat, Mar 21 1998 Cowboy wrote:
Good mornin' there good lookin',it's yer ever lovin',ever workn' cowboy
here tapping on yer screen asking in his gruff,yet polite manner for the
pleasure of your company.....Grrrr junior...?...JUnior!!!..JUNIOR!!!!,
git that ass (mmmmmm) over here and give the cowboy a little bit of
attention! Now!!!! Where the hell is that boy...off galavanting doing god
knows what...I should have never gave him full run of the Ranch...I just
knew that he couldn't be trusted to remain within shoutin' range.Damn
him anyways!!!Grrrrrrrrrrr.I 'spect I could check all the likely spots,

Viewed as a virtual parallel to much of the erotic fiction discussed in Chapter One, these acts of storytelling serve as examples of claiming such a narrative tradition *as* one's own; positioning oneself *within* a self-created SM fantasy rather than projecting one's desires and sexual subjectivities *into* an already written erotic story.

This playing of identities -- both of gender and SM positioning -- does not limit itself to only the telling of titillating tales but also seeps into the most banal of email correspondence. Through the establishment of email handles (not unlike screen names used in chatting and pet or nicknames used in RL relationships, sexual and otherwise) and the subsequent playful creation of personalities and characteristics to go along with them, emailing then can be viewed as highly performative. As well, the spectacle of the textual messages contained within the email are themselves a performance of sorts; an act of written gesture and response.

As well, through emailing SM performance can be inspired by the most ordinary of observations, even those associated with the location where the act of emailing takes place, often the workplace. As is evident in this excerpt of one email exchange, a simple office tool sends the character "Cowboy" reeling:

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the pond,the barn,the media centre....nahhh but I ain't gonna go lookin' for that l'il bastard...though I've done it before...If I have ta go into town...and if I catch him with some cheap floozy,welllllll.....it won't be too all fired purty.Guess I'll give him a minute or two....but not long... The cowboy stood on the porch,one hand jammed deep into his pocket,the other fingering his six-gun that hung loosely at his side.He stared out and saw nothing....he thought of one thing and of one thing only...."That boy" he whispered..."my boy...'

On Mon, Jan 18 1999 Cowboy wrote:
Hmmm...I've just noticed that there is a lovely wooden yardstick propped up in the corner of this office in which i sit....hhhhhmmmmmmmmm...........You said anytime.....
Bend over please,bad boy...remember,Daddy does this cuz he loves you...

    heh heh...
    xoxoxo
    Cowboy

On Tues, Jan 19 1999 Jr. wrote:
Yum yum sounds kinda fun.....smack smack smack....I can almost feel the welts forming on my pretty ass.

    Thinking 'bout it
    Jr. xxx

On Tue, Jan 19 1999 Cowboy wrote:
I can feel 'em too........mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm.
C'mere baby....closer to yer cowboy-daddy...

This "steamy" example, while indicating a very fruitful (and fun) on-line fantasy life between these two characters, also serves to illustrate the potential power of fantasy and fantasy-thinkings produced through such boundary communications; the rupturing of that invisible border between what is real and what is virtual creates an open venue for SM sexual explorations and genderplay. Safely (in many senses of the word) distanced (or removed entirely) from RL material constraints and spatial limitations, email relationships such as this allow for playful interrogations of sexual subjectivities and identities. Thus, this virtual letter writing becomes an opportune site for both provocative and productive adventures in the construction of dyke SM sexual identities, and ultimately in the creation of the dyke SM fantasy.

As the SM fantasy often involves sexual acts one may or may not engage in RL, email as a site for play also provides the space within which to both delve into

and flush out erotic potentials of the sexual imagination. As this next set of emails makes clear, not only are SM and gender positions being toyed with but so too are sadomasochistic practices:

On Thu, Apr 3 1998 Jr. wrote:
Makes a girl wanna get on her pretty little well hoiseried knees and lick those dirty boots.....in hopes of course for alittle well deserved punishing......................

ohhhh the possibilities!!!!

daydreaming about such particulars,
Jr.girl
xxxxxxx

On Fri, Apr 4 1998 Cowboy wrote:
can i beat you black and blue before i cut you?

xo
Cowboy

On Sun, Apr 6 1998 Jr. wrote:
To answer your question(s)....
But of course you may beat me black and blue before the lovely blade comes out to play....I wouldn't want it any other way....and a girl must prove herself before such a beautiful slicing, now don't you think???
About that blade licking....I wouldn't expect any less...yum yum, I can feel the sting, taste the sticky fluid.....yum yum.....perchance could that blade travel to my back???

Oh, and good mornin' precious

Jr.girl
xxxxxxx

On Tue, Apr 8 1998 Cowboy wrote:
...and well,the blood does flow soooooooooo much better..all drawn close to the surface and all....you don't mind a little salt in that wound do you? It hurts so good.
Oooh...my day...better an better an better...

Cboy xoxoxoxoxoxo

Whether these SM activities are practiced or not in RL, within this intimate realm of email communications they have erotic potency. As such, these discursive sexual interactions contributing to the creation of the SM fantasy are both powerful and productive; stoking the erotic fire which inspires fantasy-thinkings. Therefore, if seen as personally stimulating as well as

creatively constructive, emailing and email relationships offer up a new avenue for sexual interaction while at the same time adding to the erotic brew of SM fantasy production. Existing within the cyber environment rather than in RL, this form of TinySex (Turkle) has enormous potential for sexual and gender exploration, and as such functions to further expand the territory of the dyke SM fantasy.

As erotic locations for the potential creation of sexual identities (or at least the exploration of such), virtual environments come closest to described fantasy spaces and therefore can operate to encourage such sexy creative productions. Unbeknownst to (probably) most chatters and other virtual corresponders, the Internet may be the most free of sexual spaces -- an unhinged and unguarded location within which to personally or collectively explore and interrogate the construction of identity, subjectivity and gender positioning(s) free from RL distractions. Theoretically then, these erotic locations -- the chatroom and email correspondences -- do offer up imaginative and sexy possibilities wherein which to construct and re-construct the dyke SM fantasy.[33]

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[33] Though beyond the scope of this thesis, there are some difficulties which emerge through a sustained on-line email affair. "Tiny Affairs", as Turkle describes them, are "virtual adventures (which can be easier) to undertake (than those in RL) but which can also result in significant complications". (224) More interesting for my purposes is not contemplating which kinds of complications (within one's RL sexual relationship) can arise through engaging in a Tiny Affair or TinySex but instead the complications facing an email relationship as it attempts (and perhaps fails) at making this leap into reality. As this email suggests, it is a possibility fraught with both many pleasures and many dangers:

On Mon, Apr 13 1998 Cowboy wrote:
Do you think that when we fuck
it will help or hinder my obsessive desire
to possess you???

Furthermore, much as chatting is at its most productive when maintained within the space of virtual fantasy, so too are email dalliances. Certainly not of-this-world, both kinds of cyberrelations cannot and should not be forced into RL parameters; they lose their erotic potential through the exchange, if it takes place at all. Perhaps then, any erotic rapport initiated within the cyber context must be entirely relegated to the space of the virtual and within that be able to fully and entirely embody a fantasy site, allowing then the productive play of sexual subjectivities and positionings within fantasy-thinkings to emerge and develop.

Hmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm....??????
Yours,
   Cowboy

On Tue, Apr 14 1998 Jr. wrote:
That's a VERY good question.

Yes indeed,a fine question.An important question.A question that requires, DESERVES *even*, an answer more and more every day....

CHAPTER THREE
BORDERS, BOUNDARIES AND THE TRANSGENDER CYBORG
Erotic Possibilities and Theoretical Limitations

Although contemporary gay/lesbian/transgender studies have produced great insights about modern queer identities and the communities in which they flourish, it has been noticeably more difficult to talk in very specific ways about the kinds of sexual practices and sexual meanings associated with specific queer identities... It is surprising, then, that queer theory has so infrequently addressed the question of how we inhabit our various bodies, especially how we fuck, or rather, what we think (of) when we fuck. (Halberstam: 1998, 114)

On-line sexual interactions can become most erotically potent through their reliance on fantasy-thinkings. How we inhabit our various virtual bodies, how we sexually relate with others within the chatroom and through email, and what kinds of erotic musings these forms of cyber communication inspire are integral to the construction and creation of the dyke SM fantasy. As sites of explorations -- donning gender costumes, adopting a multiple of identity positions and perspectives -- these cyber locations are as sexually productive as they are sexually charged in the pleasurable (and problematic) project of dyke SM fantasy formation.

In this chapter, I seek to pin down this fantasy, or at least how it can express itself not through reality, but within the cyber environment. I will offer up an unreal figure, a fantasy inhabitant -- the transgender cyborg -- and ask how this gender variant hybrid can function to bridge the distance between sexuality, gender and desire within these virtual spaces of communication. How this

cross between sexual/gender identity and technological mediation spans the divide between fantasy construction and the virtual communities it enters into and interacts with? Are these interactions erotically productive, or are they hindered by the cybersocial environment with its regulations, modes of conduct and electronic language? How does this cyborg fare against the promises of the free and open space of the Internet? And what are the limitations imposed upon it, and the production of a dyke SM fantasy?

3.1 THE TRANSGENDER CYBORG
Embodying the Promises of (Sexual) Cyberspace

The Internet, and specifically chatrooms and the communication practice of emailing, offer up a location for the dyke SM fantasy through which, returning to Adams, the sadomasochist may "exercise the pervert's prerogative" and perform "many fetishes, many pleasures, many fantasies, (and try them on) like costumes". (Merck: 242) As such an improvisational theatre, on-line environments theoretically may promote the free circulation and exploration of sexual perspectives and gender variances of any number and configuration. As explored in Chapter One, over time a trajectory of sexual and gender explorations has emerged within this thesis -- from typical SM positionings and perspectives (top/bottom, dominant/submissive, sadist/masochist) to an increasing fascination with erotic plays of gender (butch/femme, daddy/boy, daddy/girl) -- which finds a resolution in the figure of the transgendered.[34]

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[34] The term "transgender" is an inherently complex one, and I use it here with the awareness of the ambiguities it suggests. Halberstram, in her

Turkle suggests that the Internet promotes thinkings of the self as fragmented, de-centred and multiple, thus promoting a concept of a "protean self... capable of transformations but grounded in coherence... (an identity which is) multiple but integrated". (258) Within the terms of gender and perhaps through such severe gender performances, a playful (and not so playful) morphology of gender can be given theoretical life via these computer mediated communication practices. Such recasting and reconstructing of the virtual body demonstrates the productive possibilities of the cyber world for challenges to the (normative) categories of sex, sexuality and gender within the dyke SM fantasy.

Theoretically, if we conceive of the Internet as (at least) a *less* charted sociosexual space than the real, this configuration of sexual and gender identity can find space within which to be explored, tried-on and considered. For example, if one engages in daddy/boy SM play in their real lives, on the Net it is possible to stretch the limits to such a degree as to virtually *assume* such

chapter "Butch/FTM Border Wars" discusses these problematics at length. As she states, "In the last part of this century, the invention of transsexuality as a medical category has partly drained gender variance out of the category of homosexuality and located gender variance very specifically within the category of transsexuality... Medical descriptions of transsexuality throughout the last forty years have been preoccupied with a discourse of "the wrong body" that describes transsexual embodiment in terms of an error of nature whereby gender identity and biological sex are not only discontinuous but catastrophically at odds...The recent visibility of female-to-male transsexuals has immensely complicated the discussions around transsexuality because gender transition from female to male allows biological women to access male privilege within their re-assigned genders. Although few commentators would be foolish as to ascribe FTM transition solely to the aspiration for mobility within a gender hierarchy, the fact is that gender reassignment for FTMs does have a social and political consequence." (143)

perspectives and positionings, a task not easily achieved on the levels of the

social, the political and even the sexual in the real world. In RL, as Halberstam

posits, this assumption takes the form of what she refers to as the

"transgender butch." This, as she continues, is a "form of gender transivity

that (may) be crucial to many butches' sense of embodiment, sexual

subjectivity, and even gender legitimacy." (144) Further, this assumption is

crucial in that the transgender butch signifies the "transition that the identity

requires from female identity to male embodiment... (and as such, this

perspective) conveys some of the shifts or movements and accomodations

made in most cross-gender identifications." (146)

On-line, the figure of the transgender butch, (perhaps transposed into the figure

of the transgendered or the Transman) is an identity which can be creatively

examined; removed from the constraints of gender/sexual identity negotiations

expected off-line, prompting a certain degree of freedom (of expression if you

will) which can contribute to such essential gender-playing.[35] The question(s) of

the importance of material (RL) realities (politically, culturally, socially and

sexually) of course should be acknowledged, however considered as a space for

dyke SM fantasy creation, chatrooms and emailing do offer productive

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[35]   And indeed there are many discursive possibilities. Demonstrating
the multiplicity of genderplay perspectives, this list of identities taken
from the True Spirit Conference website illustrates both the number
and the often playfulness of such names: "Butch, Transman, Gender
Outlaw, Transsexual, Drag King, New Man, Boychick, She-Bear,
Shapeshifter, Transfag, Tomboy, F2M, Passing Woman, Two-Spirit,
Amazon, Tranny Boy, Intersexual, Female Guy, Tranz, Boss Grrrl,
Transgenderist, Sir, Hermaphrodite, Questioning, Just Curious or a
Significant Other, Friend, Family member or Ally
(SOFFA)"(sexuality.org).

possibilities and perhaps can lend themselves to more serious RL identity explorations, serving as a trial ground of such considerations and questionings.

Transivity, connoting movement and crossing of borders, territories and gender geographies, eloquently explains the RL experiences of living as a transgender butch. Simultaneously existing not inside or outside of the categories of male and female, this identification encapsulates the often transient qualities of such an ambiguous gender identity. The notion of borders -- claimed, yet to be claimed and unclaimed territories -- describes the transivity of gender and sexual explorations ideally possible through computer mediated communications. Halberstam, citing the theoretical border wars between the so-called "gender-queers" and those that occupy RL positions which are contesting identities to the normative (lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc.) categories within queer communities (i.e. transitioning transgendereds and transsexuals) describes this "war" as a fight not so much about who has access to the "contested" gender, but who is able to speak about it.[36]

If, through the creation of dyke SM fantasy spaces we seek to be edge dwellers, to explore and uncover new erotic territories, to inhabit the borderlands of these theoretical (and) cyber locations, through on-line communications the figure of the transgender holds almost infinite theoretical potential. With the recognition of this subjective identity as one that is wholly fantastic, a

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[36] Halberstam cites a website titled "Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans ____" within her discussion. The site outlines 15 "rules" for approaching and speaking of transsexual identities. For more detailed information please see utexas.edu/~sandy/hale.rules.html.

demarcation of the boundaries between live interactions (the real) and cyber communications (the virtual) is most curiously productive when theoretically blurred. Much in the same ways as the written SM fantasy functions to transpose or transport the reader into an ambiguous space of suspended disbelief (we project into the character(s) just as we question their subjective fit in relation to ourselves and our desires), the erotic possibilities of gender and sexual identity creation on-line requires a similar degree of imagination.

Imagining chatrooms as improvisational theatres wherein which gender can be relegated totally to the realm of performance, such acts, gestures and discourses of cross-gender identity are not reliant on the whole gamut of expressions which constrain these acts in RL. By suggesting such abandonment of the material body, conceptions of the performativity of gender find an (albeit) imaginary placement. However, as Butler states in an interview with Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal (1993), she had no intention for her theorizations to be taken to such fantastic ends. As she explains, "There is a desire for a fully phantasmic transfiguration of the body... I don't think that if we all dragged out gender life would become more expansive and less restrictive."(2) Suited to the project of these interrogations, within the possibilities of playing on-line, this transgendered cyber manifestation does in fact become a complete "phantasmatic transfiguration of the body" and therefore, in contrast to Butler's contentions, on-line gender life is both more expansive and less restrictive than its RL counter-existence.

Considering the Internet as a geography of ambiguity, it becomes a ripe territory for the exploration of borderland identities such as the transgendered (and transgender butches) in RL. As "transgender discourse asks only that we recognize the nonmale and nonfemale genders already in circulation and presently under construction", such ambiguities appear inherent to such a real or virtual identity performed in this erotic cyber location. (Halberstam:162) Viewed in such a way, while it may seem a conveniently seamless voyage from the standard positionings within classic SM configuration(s) (i.e. top/bottom perspectives only occupied by two biological women) to more ambiguous and challenging identities as the transgendered, this cyber-terrain inspires and promotes these identity interrogations by the nature of its combination of anonymity, focus on performance (creations of avatars and on-line personae) and extensive (if not unlimited) access to global on-line discourses.

As a transgender identity assumes a great deal of instability and transivity it is in many ways most suited to occupy a place within the virtual.[37] Within the erotic cyber locations of chatrooms and emailing, a chatter is void of a physical bodily presence. Therefore, gender identities can become wholly discursive and as such their performative essence is distinguishable only

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[37] Interestingly, in my research on the Web I discovered a vast amount of sites about/for transgendereds and transsexuals. From informative sites including medical and surgical discourses for those considering transition and reassignment to more creative and erotic fiction sites to sites serving as discussion and meeting places, it seems that this sexual/gender community is not only organized globally on the Internet but has quite a strong presence in the cyber. For more detailed information please refer to the websites: Sandy Stone's webpage (actlab.rtf.utexas.edu/~Sandy/) and The True Spirit Conference site (sexuality.org) and the FTM International website at ftm-intl.org.

through acts of naming (of gender, of erotic perspectives and of sexual positionings). As such, a transgender identity, encompassing gender variances of any number, is most easily articulated, as it is in this virtual arena, only ever *articulated* and never demonstrated. This cross-gender identification, as seen as a transgressive discursive on-line performance, constitutes the construction of many sexual and gender positionings which function without the nuisances of RL political, social and cultural constraints. In this instance, this transgender performance potentially encapsulates the ultimate (dyke SM) fantasy figure.

As naming is a primary act of both self and cultural identification, such acts are obvious indicators of chosen and/or claimed -- rather than imposed -- sexual and gender identities. However, how these acts become liberatory or indicative of a conscious transgression (or transformation) of RL sexual and gender constraints must be addressed. If we consider these radical acts of gender/sexual naming as the most crucial aspect of identification, perhaps through the abandonment of the troublesome physical body (with its readable signs of social sex and gender identities) on-line, such explorations and transformations can become not only feasible, but discursively possible.
As heavily, if not entirely reliant on the computer for access to the discursive territory of gender-naming, the on-line transgender can be considered a cyborg identity. As Donna Haraway, in her seminal article "A Cyborg Manifesto" explains, individuals become cyborgs when two boundaries become problematic: first, the boundary between animal and human, and secondly the

boundary between human and machine. As Haraway eloquently states, in our postmodern time, what she describes as a "mythic time:"

> We are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation. (150)

While Haraway sees the cyborg identity as a political promise, an ontology through which to imagine and produce a feminist politics for this postmodern time, I find it more useful not so much for constructing a political position, but rather an imaginary sexual perspective within the dyke SM fantasy on-line. A chatter for example, can therefore be viewed as a cyborg in that in order to have such sexual (and non-sexual) cyber interactions they must be linked to the prosthesis of a computer. As the transgender (and transsexual) in RL has an interdependent relationship to medical technologies, if transposed into the virtual (where no need for such interventions are needed), this coupling can be transferred from the hassles of hormone therapies to a simple clicking of the mouse with similar (though of course un-real) on-line results. Theorized in this way, the computer becomes a sexual (and gender) prosthetic; or perhaps in other words, the computer becomes the the electronic reversal of the phallus?

This linking together of a virtual transgender identity with that of the cyborg is theoretically potent; dismantling both gender and sex through computer mediation to embrace the space(s) of the SM fantasy on the creative terms it

suggests. As this virtual reality can contribute to necessary ambiguity through the very characteristics of the cyber environment of chatrooms and the disembodiment afforded through emailing, perhaps such morphings of gender can be easily achieved or at least more thoroughly explored. Butler commented, when critically revisiting her theories of gender performativity that her work has been taken up by many to mean that "if gender is performative it must be radically free... and (therefore) the materiality of the body is vacated or ignored or negated -- disavowed even". (2) As a discursive performance, the transgender cyborg easily assumes a negation of the material body, perhaps completely disavowing the body's participation in the fantasy. As such, and surely not what Butler was referring to, by sidestepping the materiality of the body and the biological realities of sex while on-line, an emancipatory and "radically free" conception of gender can be envisioned, and perhaps can hold some erotic promise.[38]

If the dyke SM fantasy taken to its most simple reduction is a story, a narrative, more discursive than material, this transgender cyborg figure can function as a potentially ultra-erotic manifestation of the intersection of gender, identity and sexual practices. As an imaginary or fantastic sexual perspective (or location), the transgender cyborg nicely encapsulates the erotic potential and the playful ambiguities of gender/sex offered up within these cyber environments. In proposing this position I am both acknowledging the erotic

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[38] I use the term "promise" here to reference Haraway's theorization of the cyborg and "the promises of monsters" suggested by the title of her article "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics of Inappropriate/d Others" (In L. Grossberg, C. Nelson & P. Treichler 1992 *Cultural Studies*. New York: Routlege).

power of self-naming and the fantastic configurations available through playing on-line; offering up a fictional character to act out the sexual explorations and interrogations possible at the intersection of fantasy-thinking and computer mediated communication practices. As just one of a multitude of sexual and gender vagaries that are theoretically possible through such erotic play, the transgender cyborg stands as a sign for my own cyber-interrogations and theoretical musings within these pages.

As a chimerical figure, this transgender cyborg can only be conjured up within the scenes of the SM fantasy, its only reality the discourse within the chat, or the typed lines of emails sent and received. Therefore, this fantastic creature conceptually fulfills the erotic challenges of the SM fantasy; acting only upon the written page or scrolling down the computer screen, but having no presence elsewhere. As such it satisfies the needs of both fantasy and cyber-functioning by not only posing as an on-line avatar or personae but also embodying or inhabiting (virtually or fantasmatically) the RL masculine or gender-ambiguous position sought after by transgender-butches. As such the transgender cyborg stands as perhaps pure erotic imagination made theory.

3.2 BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES
Codes, Protocol and Surveillance On-line

Computer mediated communications, as I have discussed, while exceptionally well-suited to inspiring further explorations of the SM fantasy, are unfortunately

also fraught with complications and limitations. By virtue of the styles of communication acted out on-line and the shortcomings of such a communication practice, quite often realization(s) of such fantasy-thinkings become more problematic (or perhaps differently problematic) when they find their location within the cyber environment. For example, on the most rudimentary level of communication, many comprehensive difficulties arise while chatting on-line. Sandy Stone, in her article "The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age" (1995), makes a useful distinction between face to face (RL) communication and computer mediated communication, explaining that:

> reality is wide-bandwidth, because people who communicate face to face in real time use multiple modes simultaneously -- speech, gestures, facial expression, the entire gamut of semiotics... (whereas) computer conferencing is narrow-bandwidth, because communication is restricted to lines of text on a screen. (93)

While pleasantly discursive in practice, this method of communication leaves much that we rely on in live communications omitted, or at least certainly unspecified. In this form of communication, or narrow bandwidth interactions, as Stone eloquently explains, important information for clear understandings and comprehension is missing, making "ferocious misunderstandings over simple textual utterances" a frequent and troublesome reality. (175) Cast within the dyke SM fantasy, this reality can often inspire a crucial lack of clarity, or at least sexual (performative) discomfort. When one is immersed in a chat, such misunderstandings can be highly disruptive to the practice of

fantasy creation(s). Unlike face-to-face sexual interactions (and even non-sexual interactions) in which it is possible to garner important cues from body language, facial expressions, gestures and vocal inflections, within cyber communication these crucial social cues are not only missing, but void of a presence entirely.

While these physical omissions can theoretically contribute to an increased opening up of the fantasy-space (in that while on-line corporeal preoccupations are not an issue), it is possible that the shortcomings of such communications are themselves responsible for frozen moments and misunderstandings in on-line sexual interactions. As within live interactions, there can be paralyzing moments due to an overload of social cues and expectations, an absence of these familar aspects of RL communication can be at the root of a lack of full comprehension in the virtual, their absence making thorough comprehension a difficult task. In narrow-bandwidth computer mediated communications (or CMC as they are commonly called by Netizens), as physical information is omitted, Elizabeth Reid (1994) explains the need for users of on-line technologies to create new systems of communication. As she states:

> Smiles, Frowns, tones of voice, posture and dress -- Geertz's 'significant symbols' -- tell us more about the social contexts we are placed in than do the statements of the people we socialize with... Communication and cultural context must be expressed through new channels, and new systems of meaning must be forged by virtual denizens who wish to make sense of and to one another (on-line). (4)

As a new space for social dialogue, the creation of an on-line culture-specific language is a key factor in assuring a true sense of connectedness between chatters. To satisfy this concern, the development of a netslang, or in cyber terms, "emoticons" is essential to bridge these communications gaps on-line. An emoticon, is "an emotional icon, or a pictorial expression of the emotions of the moment. These are most commonly created on one line using the symbols on the keyboard." (1996:65)[39] Without using emoticons, it is difficult for chatters to truly (and tersely) communicate their emotions to other chatters as within the cyber environment there is a void of RL facial expressions, gesture and vocal inflections. Not only do users of on-line communication technologies use these to express their emotions, many chatters use keyboard characters to express actions as well.[40] As any regular user of the Internet knows, these symbols and this form of language have permeated the on-line experience in such a rapid fashion as to wholly eclipse other more traditional forms of prose within chatting. As well, within chatroom discourses,

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[39] As all users of CMC are familar with, basic emoticons range from the most basic "smile", depicted as either this : -) or this =) to indicate pleasure or to make certain remarks are not taken as sarcastic or misconstrued in anyway; the "frown" depicted as an inverted smile to demonstrate displeasure, as well as the common practice of capitalization to convey intense and often harsh comments to other chatters. As well, the shortening of phrases within chats is also common. For example, the now stock phrases-turned-anagrams; "lol" (laughing out loud), "btw" (by the way) and "lmao" (laughing my ass off) or the more vulgar "lmfao" (laughing my fucking ass off) are consistently employed in chat dialogues to get the point across in a quick and efficient manner.

[40] For example, to describe an action within a chatroom, often the double parenthesis is used, as in (( )) placed on either side of a particular screenname conveys the act of hugging (or often more sexual activity), whereas the double (or triple) colon :: or ::: is placed on either side of action descriptions to indicate gestures and movements within the room (such as ::: slinks her way across the dancefloor :::).

grammatical, capitalization, and spelling errors are not only acceptable but encouraged and expected. Chatters therefore place a higher value on rapidly expressing themselves then they do on having their language be read as grammatically correct. As chatting is a fast-paced activity, these alterations to language are essential for true comprehension and effective communications.

This "relaxed attitude toward sentence fragments and typographical errors" as Turkle suggests, results in a "new (kind of) writing (that is located) somewhere between traditional written and oral communication". (183) As chatting as a practice is a series of alternating between "talking" and "listening", the sexual discourse of the dyke SM chatroom, as Turkle playfully describes, can be seen as a form of "speed writing interractive erotic fiction". (313) As fantasy production is fundamentally the creation of mind-scripts, or "organized scenes which are capable of dramatization" (Creet: 149), what results then when such scripts can be virtually acted out in a cyber environment, and what are these new sexual configurations?

As ultimately language-based, this form of erotic discourse, with all its electronic parlances, creates a new venue and form of sexual interaction. As a self-created and disseminated form of expression, theoretically chatroom dialogues should be full of erotic potential and possibilities. But quite often chatroom experiences are not, and in fact are limited through this specialized cyber discourse. Moreover, as speed is of the highest importance in computer mediated communication, chatters purposefully shorten both words and phrases. For example, in inquiring as to another chatter's sex and age,

rather than ask "how old are you? and are you male or female?" most chatters simply type "age/sex". Users of on-line technologies have also created new words to describe things and people they encounter in cyberspace and at the same time many unnecessary words are entirely dropped from sentences. The grammatical articles "a", "an", "in" and "the" are the most common victims of this cyber.word dropping. Thus, the language of on-line chatters is quick, to the point and importantly terse in description, ignoring many of the rules of both written and spoken English in favour of speedy transmission. This "electronic paralanguage" or "truncated speech" (Carey) very often results in difficulties in full understanding and proper interpretation by chatters who are unfamiliar with it.

As such, this cyber discourse serves as not only a communication tool, but a method by which to delineate a hierarchy of acceptance and belonging among chatters -- from the seasoned chatter to the novice or "newbie." This prioritization and demarcation is both unifying and protective; providing a shared discursive base while at the same time identifying new chatters to the room and claiming territory. "Language", according to Saville-Troike (1989), "serves many functions. Chief among these, perhaps, is that of creating (and) reinforcing boundaries, unifying its speakers as members of a single speech community, and excluding outsiders from intragroup communication." (14) As with the construction of any social group, the importance of forging a defined space for interaction is forefront, and while necessary to determine who the members of such a group are -- or in other words, who's in and who's out --

these definitions quite often exclude and ostracize potential members of a chatspace.

As a monitored territory, chatroom spaces share much with the equally policed (community) spaces created within dyke SM cultures. As it is important to make such spaces safe for sexual exploration and interrogation the creation of rules of conduct or behaviour within them is one way of safeguarding against misuse of the territory(ies). However, with these territorial monitorings, a degree of freedom is lost in favour of issues of safety, comfort and cyber belonging.

The forms employed for the monitoring and policing of chatroom territories are numerous, from subtle tactics to very strong methods of disciplining and punishing transgressors of the chatroom rules. This intragroup communication then, is in a sense a patrolled and a coveted space to ensure that the proper protective measures for free and open discussion will occur. Thus chatrooms rely on an often tight regime of codifications (of appropriate language, action and protocol) to include as well as exclude members from these cyberspaces. Casually referred to as "netiquette", a chatter's knowledge and adherence to chatroom rules identifies their level of experience -- from bona fide chatters to curious and careful newbies to more aggressive and disruptive browsers[41] -- within the chatroom. Generally, on-line netiquette, like

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[41] A common chatting irritant in specifically marked dyke and SM rooms, these tiresome tourists or surfers are for the most part assumed to be young teenage boys who gain some kind of crass pleasure from eavesdropping on such *potentially* titillating sexual conversations. However, very often some of these chatters (and usually ones who have a

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its predecessor etiquette, encourages a style of communication that adheres to a shared and agreed upon set of chatting manners to ideally allow a fluid and productive discussion to take place. However, while promoting politeness and the creation of a give-and-take communication environment where each chatter is able to fully and freely participate, this practice is also arrived at through a large degree of conformity.

To insure such conformities, within chatrooms a certain protocol is always in place, from the proper methods of greeting other chatters in the room (the appropriate salutations upon entry, how chatters respond to inquiries, if they trade pictures or "pics" etc.) to more strict codes of behaviour heavily reliant on already established SM codifications (in RL dyke and other SM communities).

It is of course not surprising that such methods of interaction are both encouraged and demanded within dyke SM chatrooms, as their origins are the often heavily codified spaces designed through decades of RL SM play and perspectives. However, through these behavioural and procedural sexual and gender stylings, what then suffers is the possibility of reaching beyond identity and performative boundaries into more creative expanses of such subjectivities in the pursuit of the re-creation and re-articulation of them. As has recently been engaged in within some SM and leather communities in the real, a degree of reassessment and reconfiguring of the "old guard" rules and

more involved participation in the chat) are men acting as women on-line to experience that elusive "lesbian experience"or as I stated in Chapter Two, are suffering from "false lesbian syndrome."

codes in favour of newer or less rigid play procedures, in my observations, a similar kind of opening up has not taken place in the same ways in on-line SM communities. Through this careful watchdogging in chatrooms, unfortunate limitations are placed upon explorers of cyber sexual perspectives, curbing what should (or could) be a territory for erotic interrogations and play.

Policing, or at least monitoring of (dyke) SM chatrooms is a practice which is taken up by almost all members of the chatspace. As a form of community surveillance, chatters monitor -- almost zealously at times -- the behaviour of others in the room, ideally to insure a safe and productive environment for such sexual explorations to play themselves out. Perhaps the understandably reactive response to frequent misuse of the chatroom territory by undesirable participants, these methods of policing and surveillance can quite often contribute to a closing down, rather than a freeing up of SM chat discourses.

As touched upon in Chapter One, the methods of protocol policing can be extremely harsh; transgression for misbehaviour (or at least *uncommon* chatroom behaviour) adhering to the limits placed upon SM interactions in RL. From the immediately jarring responses of (in cyber-terms) gagging and ignoring one receives when speaking out of turn or too forwardly, to the

practices of filtering and finally, sinkholing, punting and killing[42], any chatroom member with even limitted computer skills can send very obvious messages to

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[42] These methods of punishment, as I briefly explained in Chapter One, involve a series of actions which render the transgressor unable to

communicate within the chat. From the "ignore" function which makes the chatter virtually mute to the more harsh practices of sinkholing (sending the transgressor innumerous flashing IMs which are impossible to respond to or delete due to their speed of transmission), punting and killing (which virtually eliminates one from the chatroom) these strategies are incredibly effective for not only silencing those who are not adhering to the rules, but tossing them out of the particular chatroom in which they have become troublesome. As a particularly illustrative example, I offer this transcription of my own experience of being "killed" in a DomSub Chatroom for transgressing the behavioural codes of the room:

Grrliepuss: I have my freedoms....a girl's gotta learn
NytPashn: ::raising eyebrow:::
NrdyCougar:thinking....something is definatly not right here:::::::::::
MstVanessa: I find your lewd behavior offensive dear
NrdyCougar: <~~~ keeping mouth shut!
MstrsInMD: I agree, Vanessa!
JMSWolf1003:Vanessa... has Grrlie done something wrong?
Jasmin4882   girlie you may have permission to play but you need to get permission first
NytPashn: Grrrlie..you are collared?
MCFSTLPRK: never known a sub to have freedoms
MstVanessa:Some things need to be taken private Wolf... this is a public room
Grrliepuss: I have prior permission...my top is fully aware of this playing of mine
MSWolf1003:   simply a kiss
Grrliepuss: so cut the policing would ya
Jasmin4882:   not permission from your top from the one you want to play with
MstVanessa: Good.. I think anything beyond that should be
MstVanessa: kept out of the room here.. don't you Wolf?
Grrliepuss: and a damn fine kiss if I do say so
MCFSTLPRK: anybody agree? Vanessa..what do you think?
MSWolf1003:   truley I agree with you
MstVanessa: Mary... I could care less what her Top does...
Grrliepuss: I beleive that permission was given....
MstVanessa: I just think she has gone far enough
Grrliepuss: whats up with this shit???
MCFSTLPRK: I agree...we should put her on Ignore
NytPashn: Grrlie ...watch your mouth
MstrsInMD: I believe that Grrlie's attitude needs adjusting.
MstVanessa: Watch your language in the room dear
MCFSTLPRK: Grrlie...I think you have been given fair warning
MstrsInMD: Who is the purported Mistress of this sub?
NytPashn: «¥±¥» wh0rd v2.° [1-9-98] by sinkhole started
NytPashn: «¥±¥» wh0rd v2.° [1-9-98] by sinkhole «¥±¥»
NytPashn: «¥±¥» Now punting: grrliepuss... «¥±¥»
MSWolf1003:   Grrlie.. some things are better left unsaid
MstrsInMD: Notice Nyt's sinkhole in action?
USeeMyHalo: tsk tsk
MSWolf1003:   but now the lesson is learned
NytPashn: «¥±¥» wh0rd v2.° - Maximum IM limit of 12 reached! «¥±¥»
NytPashn: «¥±¥» grrliepuss, wh0rd up you have been owned! «¥±¥»
NytPashn: «¥±¥» wh0rd v2.° - Punted Ppl List Scroll «¥±¥»
USeeMyHalo: LOL
NytPashn: «¥±¥» #1 grrliepuss has died by my hand «¥±¥»
NytPashn: «¥±¥» End of wh0rd.log (2 entrys) «¥±¥»

a transgressor of chatroom protocol with just a few taps on the keyboard. Coupled with the often strict codes of behaviour associated with RL SM sexual practices (the "formal mise en scene of lesbian sadomasochism -- how-to-manuals, handkerchief codes, safety rules and scenarios of 'discipline' and 'correction'." Merck:250), these methods are as efficient as they are effective in communicating displeasure to straying (or disobedient) chatters within the room(s). This practice of community policing of the chatroom space shares much then with SM rules employed and inforced within the real. Although in both realms it can be argued that such protocol is a necessary and inherent part of reinforcing the fought for boundaries of such sub or marginalized cultural communities, these regulations themselves limit what perhaps they have been constructed to protect; the unhampered expression of sexual perspectives and identities.

Sharon Stone (1986), in her discussion of the dynamics of *The* lesbian community brings to light a very interesting analysis of the power of such cultural grouping. As she states in her article "The Concept of Community in Relation to Lesbians":

> A community becomes endowed with wishes, needs, desires of its own, and is experienced as a coercive instrumentality... demanding that "political correctness" be observed within its boundaries while insisting that these boundaries are fixed and immutable... This pervasive coercion assumes an

USeeMyHalo: OH MY!!!!!!!!!
Jasmin4882:   oh my shall we go to her funeral?
MSWolf1003:   Pashn........ a bit much don't you think?
LadyAvida: Nyt is serious
USeeMyHalo: lol

anonymous, automatic character, for which no one will accept responsibility. (1986:17)

Thus, as Anderson (1983) also explains, communities are not as much collectives of same-identity-same-ideology folks, but instead a complicated and inherently troublesome grouping fraught with pleasures and problematics, or in his words, communities that can be "distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness but by the style with which they are imagined". (80) If these chatrooms make up an imaginary dyke SM on-line community, perhaps this community itself is contained within fixed and immutable borders in much the same way as Stone asserts *the* lesbian community is. Through the mechanisms or syles in which these communities have been imagined, demarcations and borders have been erected -- from the acceptable forms of communication through to who and more specifically which sexual/gender identities are deemed valid and granted "membership" and thus entry through the virtual gates. In this sense and given these limitations, how much of a space for exploring issues of sexual/gender multiplicity and identification can these mediated sites really become?

On-line dyke SM communities then, must be viewed in a similar fashion to their RL counterparts, and as such they are similarly imbued with both the theoretical challenges and the inherent connections to lesbian feminism. Thus, these surveillances and protection strategies, if they do function to reify the on-line dyke SM community, alert us to much the same theoretical challenges Creet

wages in her article, "Daughters of the Movement", that the "phantasmatic economy of lesbian SM" demonstrates "encounters between the domain of feminism and that of psychoanalysis, out of which 'new' sexualities might emerge". (253) Can we then consider these on-line players too as "spurned offspring of feminism (or) daughters of the movement?" (Creet: 254) Or are they something different entirely? If psychoanalytically, a dyke SM identity is both a deliberate transgression against the moralizing Mother-Feminism and an active desire to recuperate some of the outlaw status (and all of its sexy eroticism) lost through the mainstreaming of lesbianism, perhaps then, as the margins have and continue to erode, playing on-line may just be a further leap (a big one at that) into this outlaw territory. Thus, when we go on-line, perhaps we are simply looking for new (cyber) territories to terrorize.

Envisioned as a new borderland of playful perverts (Adams), the on-line environment is ideally a space of expression, exploration, re-articulation and re-presentation of both sexual and gender identities. Indeed as I began this investigation three years ago, I was agog with the erotic potential held within these out-of-this-world cyberterritories. Upon beginning my research I hoped (and initially found) that these sites offered invigorating opportunities for moving beyond RL dyke SM perspectives into new and uncharted arenas of sexual and gender play that seemed somewhat less hindered by the political discourses of dyke (and lesbian feminist) sociocultural communities. The creative sexual possibilites, the ability to move beyond biologically established gender identifications (and the theoretical/political assumptions connected to the sex = gender perspective) were (and I admit still are) incredibly exciting.

In rethinking the theoretical promises and challenges put forth by Turkle's project, it becomes evident that while on the level of fantasy creation and fantasy-thinkings such gender/sex projections are tenable and psychically possible, RL constraints seep into the on-line environment and limit (if they do not entirely negate) the connections between these analytical positionings and the real experiences of playing on-line. If we equate the transgender cyborg with Turkle's suggestion of a multiple identity capable of (and willing to engage in) subjective transformations, a position emerges which is erotically and ideally perfect -- free of the burden of physical and social reality and thus being erotically productive and expressive. The conceptual manifestation of the transgender cyborg retains and embodies all the sexy potential of this new communication space, offering up a kind of hero of the dyke SM fantasy.

Unfortunately, when one steps back from the ideal perfections of theory, what remains possible is less than utopic. Turkle hinges much of her arguments on the concept of the Internet as a space (albeit a fantasy space) within which it is possible to explore the psychic terrain of a multiple, de-centred and gender neutral subject, and through this garner enlightening information about ourselves, our subjective multiplicity, our gender ambiguities and perhaps the appealing and crucial desire to be someone else for a while. Indeed, as she relates the experience of one of her interview subjects, on-line interactions and relationships are "more real (to her) than (her) real life" (10). This is a common responsive thread throughout all of Turkle's project participants, and

in fact it is an understandably strong motivation for venturing into the world of the chatroom.[43]

Unpacking Turkle's argument further, the notion of multiplicity is itself paradoxically fraught with unattainable and unrecognizable aspects, functioning as a kind of scapegoating for both an admission and self-critical interrogation of one's particular (and not necessarily infinitely multiple) subjectivity(ies) and perspective(s) in relationship to both sexuality and gender identity. As well, perhaps the idea of gender neutrality itself does not address some of what is potentially expanding and intriguing about genderplay -- the erotic transivity between maleness and femaleness. Just as Halberstam's transgender butch signifies "a variety of gender-deviant bodies under the sign of non-normative masculinities and femininities," on-line gender variations also have the power to suggest unfixed gender identities. If we conceive of playing on-line as a game of crossing borders, of entering and inhabiting new gender and sexual territories for the most part unreachable in RL, such gender-fluid identities can be inscribed (and pleasurably toyed with) within such cyber dalliances. Indeed perhaps it is the very pleasures of transgressing and traversing the territory of gender itself that holds the most erotic power.[44]

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[43] Of course it is important to state that Turkle's project, while referring to same-sex erotic exchanges, does so through a heterosexual lens of (bored) couples trying *something different* and the insecurities raised through such partners' engagements on-line.

[44] As this IM session steamily explains, plays of gender variance within acknowledged male and female identities hold very exciting possibilities. It is not so much that these two players' gender positions are established, but that there is a movement between the two within one scene which illustrates the transgressive pleasure of crossing over:

Nautypuss: grabbing your ass

Within this chapter I have offered up the concept of the transgender cyborg to encapsulate this multiplicity and genderplay inspired by and through computer mediated communications; to theoretically envelop such urges and desires as are promised through the on-line experience. Although while on the level of fantasy, this character satisfies my theoretical needs, ultimately, it can never be truly realized beyond the imaginary. But does this imaginary character, this erotic fabrication need to have life outside of the SM fantasy? Stepping back,

Kat6959336:	yessss
Kat6959336:	alert and waiting
Nautypuss:	preparing my dick for your tight asshole...condom on...lubed up
Kat6959336:	dick?
Nautypuss:	girls can have dicks you know
Kat6959336:	spreading
Nautypuss:	grabbing your ass cheeks and pulling them apart...you are eager
Kat6959336:	yesss
Kat6959336:	spreading for you
Nautypuss:	entering you hard...you moan...harder I thrust...you buck with my force....
Kat6959336:	feeling you thrust into me
Kat6959336:	helpless as you enter me
Nautypuss:	ramming you harder, and harder and harder
Kat6959336:	pain mixed with great pleasure
Nautypuss:	again thrusting, feeling like I might come...holding it in
Kat6959336:	fuck me
Kat6959336:	harder
Kat6959336:	cum into me
Kat6959336:	please
Nautypuss:	thrustng deep and deeper
Kat6959336:	yes
Kat6959336:	take me
Nautypuss:	wanting you to come first on my command
Kat6959336:	helpless in your grasp
Nautypuss:	again pumping...pinching your hard nipples, biting your neck
Kat6959336:	take me
Kat6959336:	take me as yours
Nautypuss:	harder and harder and harder. I want you to come now
Kat6959336:	how shall i address you?
Nautypuss:	as sir...
Kat6959336:	sir
Kat6959336:	sir with a dick
Kat6959336:	hmmmmm
Nautypuss:	yes.....girl with a dick...
Kat6959336:	as in she male?
Nautypuss:	as in sir
Kat6959336:	nowwwwwwww
Kat6959336:	for you, yessssssss
Nautypuss:	harder and harder...lm coming too
Kat6959336:	cum into me sir

logging off and returning to the material world from that of the virtual, a kind of psychic somersaulting (or daydreaming, or simply fantasizing) can retain the fantastic beauty of such an erotic "monster." And on this level it need not have materiality, in fact it is more appealing without such mundane RL characteristics. Therefore, by unpacking the terms of this emancipatory figure of the transgender cyborg and following its adventures we can uncover what could be the most inhabitable of on-line avatars and the most theoretically challenging.

As an erotic identity and a cyber traveller, the transgender cyborg becomes a fantasy location: a place for ambiguity, for contradiction and the resistance to conformity, and as a metaphor for the struggles between community and subjective desires. It also stands as a philosophical inquiry into the missed potential of sexual and gender freedoms promised through the on-line communications of chatting and email corresponding. As a single entity, the transgender cyborg suggests the project of re-thinking, re-modeling and re-configuring the social space of the Internet, moving beyond collectivities imbued with the same regulatory push and reliance on protocol as RL into a more anarchic cybersocial endeavor promoting and encouraging sexual/gender variations and perversions of many kinds. Although emancipatory and utopian, the transgender cyborg, it turns out fulfills my project -- however unreal and impossible -- while allowing for a critical positioning and a grounded regard for play on-line. As a site for erotic exploration and the production of the dyke SM fantasy, the Internet does not offer any more or less than those locations we sexually inhabit in RL. However, it does make one hell of a fantasy.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this investigation, I find myself retreating into the space of ambivalence. Ambivalence towards notions of identity and subjectivity, ambivalence about the practice of exploring the dyke SM fantasy and even ambivalence about the value of such an endeavor. This ambivalence, comfortingly enough is echoed by Julia Creet as she describes her relationship to her project of analysis. As she states:

> This is profoundly and centrally about ambivalence, and about my own ambivalence as well... I am ambivalent about psychoanalytic theory: the uses to which it has been put in practice and in feminist theory are ony just balanced by the usefulness of its concepts. And I am ambivalent about s/m fantasy itself, yet this ambivalence -- it turns out -- is central to my understanding. (138)

Similar to Creet's feelings, I too find this ambivalence both motivating and inspiring my explorations within this thesis. Ambivalence about SM within the subcultural lesbian community pushed me to play at the boundaries, the margins, the edges of sexual and gender subjectivities and perspectives within that community. Disappointment and frustration with the limits of such sexual/social manifestations inspired my first forays into cyberspace; the hope of discovering a space within which to explore plays of gender and SM sexual positionings. And now, in retrospection of those adventures, a new kind of ambivalence emerges towards the possibilities of such playing on-line.

The dyke SM fantasy, as we have witnessed in the last three chapters, is an intriguingly complicated one. Taken wholly as a material production while mining the resources of sexuality, identity and gender within virtual sites of exploration, dyke SM subjectivities are not only potentially fluid in their articulation but ever-changing and intangible in their psychic reality.

When collating the influences of written erotica with the cyber possibilities of chatting on-line and email dalliances, the territory of the sexual fantasy becomes richer just as it becomes increasingly convoluted and complex. It is this inherent complexity which is the most appealing and attractive, not to mention entirely sexually productive.

As a fantasy, throughout the first two chapters, I demonstrated the various ways in which reading one's self (and one's sexual subjectivities) into the (cyber) texts allows for an ever-expanding arena for erotic interrogation and exploration to emerge. Through the various acts of reading -- reading erotic fiction and the practice of transposition, reading and reacting and the practice of fantasy-making within the on-line chat environment and finally the creative in-between practice of tale-making and character development associated with email writing -- the subtle and not so subtle aspects of dyke SM subject(s) construction has, I hope, been given illustration and erotic placement. Though at first glance these three acts of reading (and creating) subjectivities seem disparent and disjointed, they are absolutely intertwined and interrelated. At once similar and entirely different, the erotic story, chatting and emailing are constructed and re-construct one in the same thing, the SM dyke fantasy.

As well these three erotic practices ultimately strive towards the same goal -- to (hopefully) get off.

Read as a kind of erotic trajectory, the creative practices of dyke SM fiction, chatting and emailing exist along an increasingly mediated line of fantasy production. Within erotic fiction one needs to read oneself into the story; not actively producing an SM fantasy but rather adopting and/or projecting sexual subjectivities into an already laid out fictional framework. Chatting, the next practice along this imaginary line can be viewed as a kind of do-it-youself fantasy. While immediate in its gratifications, it is ultimately finite and disposable, existing only for as long as one is engaged in the chat, with no record of the erotic practice remaining after one has logged off. As the halfway point between the two, email as a creative production can be viewed as more permanent than chatting (or perhaps is simply just longer or sustained chatting). In this practice, one has time to absorb and reflect before responding to an email as well as time to create erotic (on-line) personae and through them develop the appropriate narratives. Thus, the practice of emailing is the closest to a self-created fantasy space available within these erotic cyber locations. As erotic fiction can be viewed as illustrative (and connected to) theories of dyke SM, emailing can be seen as how to write creatively within the "cyber" world, and as such the production of one's own erotic fantasy through this (relatively) new arena of global computer mediated communication.

At the beginning of this investigation two interrelated questions or inquiries were posed: the curious interrogation of subjectivity and gender identifications within a written dyke SM fantasy and more so how technological mediation inspires and inevitably alters this fantasy construction to potentially allow for multiplicity and fluidity of such identifications to play themselves out within these cyber environments.

In Chapter One, I argued that it was possible to map out a trajectory over time within the SM fantasy -- within both erotic literature and media productions -- from typical SM positionings and perspectives (top/bottom etc.) to an increasing fascination (and inclusion within the fantasies) of plays of gender (butch/femme, daddy/boy, daddy/girl) which finds one potential sexual/gender resolution in the figure of the transgendered. In reconsidering Adams' emancipatory notion of the SM dyke as "enacting differences in a theatre where roles freely circulate" (264) it is possible, through my articulations in Chapter Two, to consider the Internet as such an improvisational theatre. Within this theatre, I argued in Chapter Three, the figure of the transgender cyborg dons the costumes of the "pervert", the gender ambiguities of the "transgender butch" and delves into the virtual territory of on-line communication sites.

As a chimeric character within the story of the dyke SM fantasy, the transgender cyborg theoretically offers up subjective position within the intersection of sexual/gender identification and the technological communication practices of chatting and emailing. Nicely encompassing the

fictional (the written story of SM), the subjective (productive plays of sexuality and gender identifications) and the virtual (cyberspace) the transgender cyborg becomes the fantastic promise and the narrative conclusion to my explorations.

However, when brought back to reality or RL this figure unfortunately cannot, and does not satisfy the actual problematics of these virtual spaces. Returning to issues of conformity, chatrooms, monitored and regulated through an elaborate surveillance programme, as I have discussed in Chapter Three, inevitably re-enscribe, rather than re-new or re-create comfortable (as they are familiar) systems of socially acceptable community behaviour as well as a schemata of ways in which to socially function or engage with one another which are at their most persuasive and functional when they inspire and promote conformity. Conforming to the rules of the chat, through netiquette and emoticons does certainly make the chatting experience richer through clear (and shared) understanding and communication. However, in keeping with my metaphor of borders and boundaries, it also creates an almost impenetrable blockade which through its narrow behavioural allowances cannot ever accept (and welcome) different or alternative sexual and gender variances beyond those inscribed within its walls. Thus, while Turkle's emancipatory picture of "life on the screen" as an opportunity to explore and expand identities is an attractive ideal, it may be an ideal that is free to embrace for only so long and only from particular (sexually and gender normative) subjectivities and perspectives.

In the development of any cultural community -- on the Net and within subcultural groups in RL -- identity, that of assuming membership within the group, inspires feelings of both ambivalence and frustration. Our relationship to, for example, a lesbian cultural identity becomes then one of both attraction (the desire to belong, to fit in) and indifference (towards the social and cultural regulations one must abide by for membership). This complicated mixture of simultaneous hesitancy while feeling intensely committed to a community is addressed by Butler in her article, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," (1991) as she explains:

> I am permanently troubled by identity categories, consider them to be invariable stumbling-blocks, and understand them, even promote them, as sites of necessary trouble. In fact, if the category were to offer no trouble, it would cease to be interesting to me: it is precisely the pleasure produced by the instability of those categories which sustains the various erotic practices that make me a candidate for the category to begin with. (14)

Butler's words, while specifically describing the troubling and tricky territory of lesbian cultural identity, also demonstrate the motivation for feeling a sense of ambivalence towards both the lesbian (and dyke SM) community and its companion (or counterpart) on-line community. Indeed, it is the instability of identity categories which inspires a collective desire for unified political, cultural and sexual practices in hopes of firming up the tenuous ground upon which subcultural and marginal communities are formed and stand. In light of the strict practices of on-line netiquette, one can understand the need for promoting conformity within the cyber ranks. However, such conformist conventions also motivate an often intense desire to shake up, question,

challenge and interrogate the tenets of such cultural groupings. It is this ambivalence towards RL dyke cultural communities and practices which inspires explorations of the virtual in the first place, ambivalence is what inevitably forces us to find new territories to terrorize. Ultimately then, what needs to be considered in any analysis of on-line spaces, or on-line communities is who and how those communitiees were formed.

As a once vast and open territory within which to potentially create alternative methods of interaction and inhabitation, the Internet, has now become a compartmentalized and highly structured social space. As netiquette tersely describes the preferred methods for cyber interaction, the question is who initially set out this complex on-line communication system and who continues to inforce these codes. While of course it is important to have an agreed upon set of social practices within any interactive space, I question the rigidity and ideological construction of such locations on a more general level. Are these inhabitants of on-line chatrooms -- these Netizens -- through netiquette not reproducing a social environment that, rather than taking up the challenge of creating new ways of interacting, functions and upholds the RL social order? Can we see these Netizens then as the cyber equivalent of our feminist foremothers, the makers of the rules? As these codes and communication methods, as I have said, contribute to the demarcation of privileged territories, it therefore functions to control the social space of the chatroom, and by extension the discourse(s) within it. Standing as a method of separating Newbies from Netizens, netiquette contributes to the creation of a small society (or private club or even State?) with power -- in the form of

communication rules and tools -- in the hands of the rulemakers, the seasoned chatters. Even more troublesome, these rules and modes of interaction on-line are more difficult for the Newbie to both comprehend and master, and without RL physical codes that can give clues to the uninformed, netiquette limits access to chatroom discussions; creating stumbling blocks for new chatters.

Viewed in this way, it is not so much the protocol and surveillance techniques used within chatrooms which limits, but the chatters, the upholders of the rules, which themselves actually retard the possibilities of exploring new sexual and gender configurations within the SM dyke fantasy. If in fact on-line communities have been constructed using similar social structures as exist in RL, it is no wonder that transgression from the very specific rules of conduct and communication are so severely punished. As Foucault (1977) sums up for us, this form of punishment, through surveillance, while almost invisible is incidiously present in all social interractions and institutions. As he state:

> Our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. (88)

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Therefore, while toted as a free and open space, an arena as Turkle suggests in which to "build a multiplicity of identity" (178), perhaps the freedoms granted within chatrooms only go so far, and are consistently subject to monitoring and watchdogging. The difference may of course lie with the nature of these sexual explorations in contrast to the sexual conventions of the majority of the room. Much as RL lesbian communities have historically been highly critical of (and less than hospitable towards) SM dykes and SM practices in general, on-line it is curiously within chatrooms that are described as spaces for and created by SM dykes that the regulatory essence and presure of conformity becomes most evident. In my explorations within these rooms, rather than allowing for such "deviancies" as genderplay and even a fluidity of SM perspectives to occur, there often is a shutting down of such discourses. This shutting down is most often suggestive rather than explicit, adopting as a method of control (or hiding behind) an explanitory discourse of netiquette in favour of a more directly critical articulation of what (about the practices toyed with in the room) may have caused chatters some discomfort. What emerges through this then, is not unfamiliar; not only a reification of *the* community with its immovable boundaries but a "coercive instrumentality" (Stone: 1986) which dictates the ways in which chatters should identify and act out their sexual (and gender) positionings.

Thus, while theoretically plausible and erotically imaginative, these suggested plays of sexual subjectivities and gender identifications (as illustrated through the transgender cyborg) are perhaps as problematic and untenable within dyke SM chatroom environments as they are within the contemporary dyke

community in the real world. Therefore, as Butler (1991) contests, even within this new (cyber) social space, the very practice of identification is imbued with the normalizing structures that it seeks to overturn. As she states, "identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression." (13) As a regulatory regime, the protocol of SM chatrooms protects just as it limits explorations. Under the guise of chatters' safety and a discourse of networthy communication and cyber behaviours, how to perform is as (if not more) important than the sexual perspectives put forth within the chatroom. Thus, this functions to restrict what could potentially be a newly configured sexual/social space by recreating an erotic venue akin to those perhaps cyber(s)explorers wish to move over and beyond.

On-line chatrooms and other cyber communication spaces are described as composing an on-line "community."[45] While connoting an open and inviting social sphere, as I have demonstrated, this organizational structure simply reproduces conventions and social modes that already exist within the real. With this in mind, one fundamental question arises, why are we trying to reproduce social structures within this new space of the Internet which are similar to those in RL? While initially a vast and open space available for the projection and activation of new ways of existing and communicating with

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[45] The term "community", curiously enough, is regularly used to describe on-line environments, the most transparent usage being AOL's homepage moniker "The largest and fastest growing on-line community in the world".

others, new ideas in structuring this virtual space have been disfavoured over a reproduction of old (comfortable) social models.

As I have presented, the figure of the transgender cyborg fulfills the erotic expectations of the dyke SM fantasy within cyberspace. However, it seems that this figure cannot ever find cyber-actualization within an on-line environment. The reason for this may lie with the disparate concepts of the community (SM chatrooms) and the individual (the transgender cyborg). Through a strict protocol of netiquette, chatrooms foster a community environment, an environment built upon collective acceptance and an adherence to already established set of regulations. Rather than inspiring a so-called community spirit, chatrooms then become locations for specialized and codified methods of communication; a territory which is monitored and ultimately functions to exclude rather than include new members and even hierarchize sexual interactions. Sadly, instead of entering a new frontier of erotic promise, new sexual and gender configurations and perspectives, dyke SM chatrooms are not unlike the lesbian community spaces such inquisitive perverts have sought to escape from.

The Internet, with its potential for unlimited explorations and unguarded sites for play, becomes then yet another environment which, while initially holding some promise, upon closer and more involved interrogations does not meet the challenge. If it is possible to create a new on-line world of cyber freaks and on-line transgender cyborgs, it must emerge from a conscious and focussed effort to reconstruct these cyberspaces, to allow for the motivations and

desires of such distinct sexual voices to help dictate the shape of the sexual on-line environment. Perhaps through this toiling we can create erotic locations for productive, challenging and importantly stimulating sexual and gender play. Therefore, while we continue to be edge-dwellers, continue the search for new territories to terrorize in the exploration of sexual/gender manifestions it is crucial to critique these new sites with the knowledge gained through previous travels and a sense of the historical context within which SM dyke subjectivities and identities have been formed and continue to develop. Cyberspaces, like all subcultural sociosexual locations, are constructed and built upon already-established codes and protocol and while challenges to such community standards -- on or off-line -- are that which ignites re-construction and re-configuration of such spaces, it is also a healthy dose of ambivalence which stokes the inquisitive fires.

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