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### **I Don't Like Macho, Put It Away: Considering Queercore Men in Context**

“What's a man now? What's a man mean? Is he rough or is he rugged? Is he cultural or clean?” (Pansy Division, Real Men) These questions that open the Pansy Division song “Real Men” are critical to the study of masculinity from an academic standpoint, but also from a cultural standpoint. The trouble with masculinity is that it does not stand alone as a solitary identity. There is no singular way to be a man<sup>1</sup>, and being a man is not an experience that is separable from other identities carried in social experience. Is a man rough or rugged? Yes, certainly. Is a man clean or cultural? Of course he is! Masculinity is contextual.

I wish to explore the degree to which masculinity is informed by its context and consider how masculinity in a subculture thrives without being destroyed by mainstream ideas about masculinity. Mainstream masculine manifestations marginalize minority men mainly through the use of violence and intimidation. These tools of the dominant culture reinforce a type of masculinity that is already prevalent in the culture. Such strongly presented cultural norms are often hidden in discussions of masculinity with the title “hegemon”. To identify mainstream masculine norms as “hegemonic masculinity” abstracts the meaning of that particular variant of masculinity and perhaps reinforces its dominant position by presenting it as an identity with more solidarity than actually is present. Subcultural masculinities are no different in that respect, each individual enacts masculinity differently due to his own cultural context, or where his

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<sup>1</sup> Man is a title assigned to an individual who is accepted as a member of the masculine gender or the institution of masculinity of their culture.

various cultural identities intersect. To explore these concepts I have selected a subculture that is perhaps the most divergent from identifying with mainstream norms for masculinity, queercore. Queercore actively resists assimilating into Western mainstream masculine performance, despite external social pressures to conform. However, does masculinity in queercore maintain masculine gender norms, but reinterpret them in its own context?

Queercore does not attempt to implement a mainstream concept of masculinity. Many lyrics in queercore music are directly critical of macho masculine concepts such as heterosexuality, toughness and misogyny (Pansy Division; Dawson 129). Pansy Division's "Cowboys Are Frequently Secretly Fond of Each Other" attempts to apply queer elements to cowboy culture, which is typically cited as a reference for masculinity (Pansy Division, Cowboys Are Frequently Secretly Fond of Each Other). The use of those elements in queercore music treats "straight" masculinity as being false, questioning if there is a heterosexual masculinity. Much of queercore music is critical of mainstream masculinity, but the critique does not stop with music. Queercore does not enforce or inform a specific concept of masculinity. There exist many opportunities for a variety of performances of gender that can be considered masculine within the context of the queercore scene. The use of macho drag allows participants in queercore to enact different masculine identities, such as neo-Nazi, athlete, cowboy or any other hyper-masculine stereotype. In some instances these performances are paired with same-sex sexual encounters, eroticizing the hyper-masculine identities (Dawson 135). In eroticizing the stereotypes they are brought into the realm of queer, distancing the identities somewhat from their normal social power. Mainstream masculinity maintains discipline and ensures compliance through a system of informal negative social sanctions involving derogatory heterosexist language (Pascoe). In queercore the same language is used as a terrorist tool to establish that

queercore is a threat to the mainstream, decentering the initial intention of the language. Despite this seemingly strong rejection and critique of mainstream masculine ideology there are elements of queercore that have a strong resemblance to mainstream masculinity. Queercore contains some participants and media that attempt to establish queer as superior to other cultural forms and attempt to enforce compliance of its non-compliance ideology. Others in queercore use physical violence against those that oppose them, utilizing macho displays of power to settle disputes (Cimminelli and Knox xiv). Through the rejection of “straight” mainstream masculinity, but the continued adherence to certain masculine traits of dominance and aggression I believe that queercore is not entirely successful in fully separating itself from more traditional forms of masculinity, but instead reinterprets masculinity and establishes new standards and new meanings which are in line with the objectives of the queercore cultural context.

## QUEERCORE AS A DO-IT-YOURSELF CULTURE

Before exploring the expression of masculinity in queercore it is important to first look at the cultural constructs which allows a distinct masculinity to exist and thrive outside of the mainstream cultural systems. The major construct which allows queercore to exist counter to the mainstream is its use of the punk Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethos. DIY provides a means by which alternative masculinities, including those in queercore are allowed to exist with relative autonomy. Queercore and other punk subcultures that embrace DIY utilize self-production methods (Moran 64). The queercore scene writes, performs, records and distributes its own music as well as other cultural elements such as fan-zines. The elements produced inside the culture are not distributed for profit, but instead for cultural engagement. The music and the

culture are not dependent upon financial systems as indicators of success, nor is such “success” viewed positively inside the scene (Cimminelli and Knox 52). In effect the autonomy generated by being a culture created and maintained by the efforts of the participants gives queercore another trait of being masculine. The culture is not at the whim of the marketplace and therefore does not become subject to the authority of any external force.

Perhaps the most empowering element of DIY is that it is a space where it is possible to experiment, not only musically but in all forms of expression. For men it is a space where it is possible to question the hegemonic standard of masculinity and explore the interaction of masculinity and sexuality without violent oppression that would likely result in normative spaces (Buechele 8-9). There is an element of masculinity that can be interpreted from participation in a DIY culture as well. Because a large amount of work toward the *products* of queercore is done internally, the participants of queercore are hands-on in the process and express control over their creations. Through the direct participation in the process of creating, artists in DIY expend more effort on their work than many mainstream performers and take considerable personal risk in their artistic choices. While success in the traditional sense is not important in queercore, contributing material to the community which is well-received and highly regarded within the community is of importance in queercore. For a man in queercore the impact on the scene is what reasserts or diminishes his worth.

An interesting difference between queercore and its mainstream counterpart is their value on artists and the gendering of their accomplishments. Mainstream commodity culture can be interpreted as feminizing popular cultural elements and their producers through fetishized appropriation of their work and their image. In queercore artists and other producers of content are highly regarded and interpreted as masculine because of their cultural presence. The

difference between the two cultures is that mainstream culture is a one-way passive production of music that is sold as a commodity, whereas queercore is a two-way active interaction and engagement with the community.

Most culture in Western society is produced or distributed inside of a commodity system. The traditional commodity system is where mainstream masculinity is able to maintain itself and keep other masculine identities marginalized. Through the control of the production and distribution of cultural elements that contain messages pertaining to an ideal or hegemonic form of masculinity the mainstream dictates what ideas about masculine identity are available to be consumed. DIY is the mechanism through which queercore is able to overcome restrictive concepts of masculinity that are produced and maintained by the hegemon, as DIY culture involves taking charge of factors of production, which in turn creates the ability to establish a social structure that is outside of mainstream society (Buechele 2).

The creation of a social structure that is outside of mainstream society subverts the dominance of mainstream masculinity by removing traditionally important aspects of masculinity from the cultural experience. In the hegemon financial independence is prized as a trait of masculinity because of the influence over the marketplace as well as its value as a symbol of self-sufficiency and independence. DIY is not engaged in traditional systems of commerce the success of a particular band is not determined by the wealth of their fans, but instead by how true the artist remains to the values of the scene (Moran 64). The impact for queercore is that their music is accessible to a wide range of people, regardless of their financial means, who share the punk values of self-expression. The reach in the underground distribution channels is a tool of subversion which allows queercore to generate an alternative set of ideas about masculinity, sexuality and interpreting mainstream identities. Ideas that are so radically different from

mainstream culture can spread through DIY channels because they are shared through peer-interaction. The personal connection between queercore artists and participants encourages social exchange and not commercial exchange, placing more meaning (and perhaps more value) on the music. The DIY ethos places the artist more in touch with the scene and therefore the artist is focused on the community in which it exists, not a marketplace. As Team Dresch proclaims: “Do it yourself means do it for me.” (Cimminelli and Knox 52)

## LYRICALLY QUEERING STRAIGHT MASCULINITY

The lyrics of queercore are an influential component of the political aspects of queercore and its rejection of mainstream masculine traits. One element that is utilized repeatedly in queercore lyrics is the queering of macho masculinities, examining the macho identities outside of their heterosexual context. The queering is accomplished by placing the identities in queer situations, or by introducing symbols of the identity as an element of eroticized fetish.

A song that both queers an identity and fetishizes its symbols well is “Cowboys Are Frequently Secretly Fond of Each Other” by Pansy Division. The song opens with “There's many a strange impulse out on the plains of West Texas”, setting the tone for a story-like sequence of lyrics describing same-sex relationships between cowboys. Throughout the story references are made to many of the symbols which are linked to a cowboy masculine performance, indicating them as signs of the attraction between cowboys. “Cowboys are frequently secretly fond of each other; that's why they wear leather and Levi's and belts buckled tight” is a very direct assignment of cowboy clothing being associated with an unspoken desire between men (Pansy Division, Cowboys Are Frequently Secretly Fond of Each Other). The reasoning for the assignment of the

clothing to a specific type of sexuality is not directly stated in the song, but it is possible to extrapolate meaning from both the cowboy culture and queer culture at the time. The inclusion of a reference to leather as a general term may be an allusion to gay leather culture that emerged in the 1970s, which was as an attempt to present a macho image for gay men to more easily assimilate into heterosexual society (Weinberg 21). In the reality of the “uniform” worn by cowboys, it is likely that the song is referring to leather chaps that are worn during certain types of work, but the lack of clarity allows for a broader association with gay stereotypes. Similarly the use of “Levi’s” in lieu of a more generic term such as jeans may be seen as rendering a specific image of a cowboy in slim-fitting denim pants that would accentuate and outline bodily features in a mostly same-sex profession. The lyrics describe a hidden femininity and lady-like qualities among cowboys in private “even though they take speed and drive pickups and shoot their big guns” (Pansy Division, Cowboys Are Frequently Secretly Fond of Each Other). With the inclusion of the “even though they” line the adherence to traditional ideas of masculine presentation is reinforced, ensuring an association between the private same-sex desires and the image of the hyper-masculine cowboy who exhibits traits of material masculinity, risk taking and aggression. Throughout the narrative the actions between cowboys are described as being secretive and the feelings shared as not being comprehended fully. The discretion is further backed by descriptions of “small town” attitudes toward “when somebody falls between sexes” and descriptions of homophobic retribution for any discussion of the feelings or actions between cowboys that are spoken above a whisper. The conclusion that the song sets up is one of secret homosexuality between cowboys that is hidden under a guise of false masculinity and that is carefully guarded because of societal penalties in small towns. Given the conditions of the song

any accusations of homosexuality between cowboys could not be easily defended because of the complex levels of obfuscation that are alleged to be in place to protect them.

While there are few songs that call an identity into critique as clearly as “Cowboys Are Frequently Secretly Fond of Each Other”, other songs provide more sudden bursts of attack against the presumed heterosexuality of an identity. “Yes, Sir” by Extra Fancy is a critique that is directed internally to gay BDSM culture, but throws a few lines to raising a question about the sexuality of skinheads, as well as presenting an alternative construction of “real men” (Cimminelli and Knox 21).

“Skinheads showed up there;  
They’re all about breaking bones.  
I never seen their girlfriends.  
I guess real men run in packs.”

In this instance the violence of the skinhead identity is presented first, as it is one of the more notable traits of their culture, perhaps to confirm the authenticity of the particular group of skinheads that the narrator encountered in the context of the song. The absence of other traits affirming their heterosexuality, such as female companionship, is presented as a statement of fact with the only additional clarification being a statement of “real men run in packs”. The implication is therefore that the reason that the “girlfriends” are never seen is because “real men” function as a unit that would be disrupted by the presence of entities that are not skinhead men. A further implication is that in the absence of girlfriends, the skinheads have sexual involvement with each other (Cimminelli and Knox 21). While a normative reading of the lyrics would perhaps not allow for those implications, in the context of the greater queercore movement which is heavily focused on sexuality in lyrics there are few other messages that could be drawn from the lyrics. The invocation of the “real men” concept further problematizes mainstream ideas

about masculinity. If skinheads hold the traits that determine “real” masculinity and skinheads enact homosocial activity that could be interpreted to be discreetly homosexual then “real” masculinity can be given traits of homosexuality. The actions of a single man or group of men cannot change the definition of masculinity, but in introducing the idea of homosexual skinheads who are real men can have a destabilizing effect on the conception of masculinity. Such an idea also opens masculinity to a philosophical examination regarding some of its more stringent homosocial sects. Can men associating only with other men produce a masculinity that is more real (or more pure) than a heterosexual masculinity? Is heterosexual desire a weakness in men that diminishes masculinity or masculine expression? Such discourse would likely not be tolerated by the hegemon or in mainstream music, but in the DIY space of queercore such thoughts can flourish and be considered as an alternative interpretation of masculinity.

As powerful as the tools of fetishizing materials of masculinity and eroticizing masculine identities are they are not the only elements that are used in queercore music to be critical of macho masculinity and to reject its influence on the presentation of men. The rejection of the macho image is carried out by dismissing elements of the image and by presenting alternative images in a positive context. Few songs in the queercore cannon present both ideas as clearly as Pansy Division’s “Fem in a Black Leather Jacket”. The lyrics do not hesitate to present succinctly the views of the writer:

“I don't like macho, put it away  
Doesn't appeal to me, straight or gay  
But I know a boy who catches my eye  
He don't act tough, why should he try?” (Pansy Division, Fem in a Black Leather Jacket)

The narrator directly states that macho presentation is not appealing to him and clarifies that it is not appealing as a characteristic of either gay men, who could perhaps, but not necessarily, be

equated to potential sexual partners or for straight men, who would culturally be less likely to be considered as a prospective sexual partner. In no aspect of the song does the language differ from referring to the subject as a “boy”, man is never invoked. This omission in mainstream culture, especially pop music, may construct the subject as emasculated, but in the context of queercore culture the use of gendered terminology is likely intentional to distance the subject from the macho images imparted when the word man is used. Later in the song the traits that the narrator finds favorable are listed: “With his long long hair and pouty lips; cute little butt and sexy hips; he looks as good in a skirt as he does in jeans” (Pansy Division, Fem in a Black Leather Jacket). The long hair and the defined butt and hips that are found to be appealing are characteristics that in other cultural contexts would be thought of as feminized and not gender conforming. “Fem in a Black Leather Jacket” does not put forth an argument for the classification of the subject’s gender presentation being considered as masculine, but it does consider the presentation aesthetically and places the “fem” gender display as more preferable than a “macho” display. To understand this aesthetic assessment requires involving the sexuality of the writer/narrator of the song. Pansy Division represents themselves as being exclusively homosexual and therefore that is the lens through which the subject’s presentation must be viewed. In the song’s conclusion the narrator states “I can't wait to get him undressed”. The statement is directly related to a sexual encounter, but can be interpreted metaphorically as well. The undressing metaphor equates the subject’s clothing to the subject’s gender presentation. In *undressing* the subject from his gender presentation the narrator is looking to the subject’s internal concept of self. This interpretation implies that for the subject the macho identity would be a fabrication or enacted performance that is inconsistent with the subject’s self-concept. The subject is able to hold claim to masculinity by enacting a gender role that is congruent with his self-concept. This metaphor

could also potentially feminize the macho presentation if it were to be performed outside of congruence.

Queercore culture is vast and thrives outside of the music, but the music provides a wealth of opportunities to promote alternative discourse regarding sexuality and the construction of a masculine identity. Through queering straight macho presentation and placing symbols of macho identity into the context of same-sex sexuality queercore music puts forth numerous ideas that can be considered when considering the position of queercore in masculinity or masculinity in the context of queercore.

#### MACHO DRAG IN QUEERCORE

Political activism is central to what defines punk (Moran 58). For queercore that activism is in the realm of identity politics. In queercore the enactment of an identity that is contrary to a straight macho identity is a political act, whether intention or incidental, but some participants of queercore take the politics of identity even further. Some people both in and out of the scene interpret queer to be a queering of sexual and gender identities and see the scope of the movement to be limited to those tasks. Others take queer to be of a more abstract political base, charged with destabilizing and decentering any idea that is related to the hegemon or its influence on society. Queercore participants, who in a previous social context may have found it necessary to masquerade to fit in, are somewhat familiar with the performance of identities without necessarily internalizing the identities. The recognition of various forms of self-presentation gives participants in queercore the opportunity to enact identities informed by other cultures and political movements. The enactment comes in the form of drag, camp, parody or

ironic citation through appropriation (Dawson 125). For queercore participants drag and parody are powerful methods to queer macho styles and put them to use for their own political and erotic benefit.

One of the most heavily appropriated identities in queercore is that of the neo-Nazi skinhead. Other performances such as jock and military officer are possible, but are not enacted as often or as strategically as the skinhead. Most participants of queercore disagree with the racist, hyper-masculine and misogynistic ideology that the skinhead image represents, but it became an almost ideal vehicle for destabilizing hegemonic ideas of masculinity, among other things (Dawson 125). The skinhead image is strategically significant to queercore as it represents the type of hyper-masculinity that queercore is opposed to but it is also a marginalized identity.

Performing a parody that is too close to the hegemon may render the performance invisible against backdrop of the diversity of mainstream culture. Through the parody of a marginalized group that has a deviant status there is the opportunity for disruptive attention to the performance itself. The status of being a conforming member of mainstream society is an invisible status which comes with little political benefit beyond quiet subversion. One of the queercore critiques of gay masculinity is that it “passes” in heterosexual society. Passing in straight society does not advance any awareness of a queer culture and may actually serve to draw attention away from it. Also, as will be explored later, to participate in straight masculinity as a non-heterosexual results in being interpreted as a degraded masculinity. Such a reduced identity affects not only the individual performing the masculinity, but also others that may hold identities that intersect, such as in the case of a queer identity. In the performance of a degraded masculinity as a queer individual it degrades the masculinity of other queer men, even if they are not participating in straight masculinity. The social cognition technique of stereotyping is the

vehicle upon which this transference of the reduced identity occurs. Through enacting a performance of an identity that one does not hold as a part of the self-concept, such as in performing a straight masculinity as a queer man, there is a false element to the identity and the man is not read as being authentic if his queer identity is ever disclosed.

In performing a marginalized identity, the distinction of being queer is not lost. Concerns about congruence between self-concept and the identity being performed are mitigated in the enacting of the identity as an act of parody or drag and as such not attempting to pass as the straight variant of the identity. Marginalized identities utilize their distinction from the mainstream as a tool by which to gain attention. If two men performing straight masculinity were to kiss affectionately in public the act itself would be a transgression, but in a room crowded by similarly *normal* people the transgression may go unseen, whereas if one of the men was dressed in skin drag the outward presentation itself would distinguish the individual from the crowd and draw attention to the act. Furthermore, marginalized identities are in themselves queer from the mainstream and thus less likely to result in a loss of credibility in the scene. The attributes as a marginalized identity, combined with easily identifiable macho presentation make the skinhead style an ideal candidate for appropriation and parody.

Participants in queercore utilize several different levels of fetishization and appropriation of skinhead identity, ranging from occasional use of Doc Martens, bleachers and braces during a sexual encounter for enacting a form of hyper-masculine skinhead drag to a more serious appropriation whereupon a queer interpretation of the skinhead identity is enacted as a primary presenting identity. There is also difference in the depth of the parody; some adopt only the stylistic and visual elements, whereas others take on personality traits of skinhead culture including intolerant violence against those with differing opinions.

Because queercore is rooted in sexual identity politics, it is through erotic interaction with the appropriated identity that the most influential political work is done. The absolute difference maintained in heterosexual skinhead culture provides a point of weakness regarding the interaction with sexuality. The border-work that is done to maintain a separation from outsiders through violent defense of the principles of their political agendas leaves the skinhead identity without flexibility in presentation, which is evident in the almost uniform-like style of dress that is implemented within skinhead groups. The flaw with such an absolute identity is that any interaction between heterosexuality and homosexuality results in a queering of the heterosexuality of the skinhead identity. Such an interaction was documented in an issue of *J.D.s.*, a queercore zine. The encounter described begins with a skinhead dominating a “queer” through verbal insults and a dialog wherein the skinhead subordinates the position of the queer based on his sexuality and the queer is encouraged to recite his own subordination. During the exchange of dialog the skinhead asks the queer “What are you good for?” to which the queer replies “Sucking cock and licking boots, Sir” (Dawson 133). The skinhead utilizes elements of fag discourse to strip the queer of his masculinity through the dialog, reaffirming the skinhead’s own masculinity and heterosexuality. As the encounter continues the skinhead’s domination of the queer turns sexual and the illusion of heterosexuality on the part of the skinhead is dissolved, revealing a queer skinhead identity. While the domination begins in an arrangement that seems as though the skinhead is in control of the situation, the movement into the sexual domination reveals that instead it is the skinhead who is the subject of the fantasy of the queer. The exercise of domination on the part of the skinhead in the encounter is an expression of his need to be desired by the queer, essentially seeking to be objectified. For each attempt at reasserting the dominant position and heterosexuality of the skin drag performance the skinhead is reaffirming

his willingness to be the subject of the queer's fantasy (Dawson 134). In performing the skinhead identity in such an encounter the skinhead identity is being eroticized and its political value is fetishized to become encapsulated in erotic value of the identity for the participants. The identity is therefore diminished somewhat in regards to its political agenda and is distanced from its claim to masculinity based on its own standards. While the identity may not be separated from macho, racist and heterosexist motivations across mainstream culture, the widespread performance of skin drag in queercore has destabilized the skinhead identity within the context of queercore. The destabilization occurs when the absolute certainty in a type of presentation is destroyed by the ambiguity that is created by the parody performance. Without an absolute division between what is skinhead, which would never be homosexual, and what is not skinhead there is no undeniable meaning to the identity; what was before unquestioned has now been questioned and the socially created meaning is also called into question.

The fetishization of stylistic components of skinhead culture, such as Doc Marten boots, attempts to destabilize the identity in a different way; fetishization reduces the masculinity of the identity to its component parts and then exploits them for their erotic value. Doc Martens and other material symbols used by skinhead culture are already involved in a commodity fetishization in which the skinheads instill their identity in the objects and the object and the identity become linked. If it is perceived that a skinhead's power and claim to his identity is somehow held or represented by his Doc Martens, then removing his boots reduces his claim to that power and identity, at least symbolically. If a queer identified person then puts on the boots, does the power and identity then become symbolically transferred to that person? It is unlikely that a skinhead would interpret the situation in that way as there is more to the identity than the symbols, however if in the cultural context of queercore the identity is rendered as the sum of

the symbolic elements, then it is possible to acquire the identity by acquiring the components of the style.

Due to the specific types of clothing and style of dress that skinheads have already appropriated as being a component of their collective identity the eroticism of the macho identity is transferred to the object, which may be possessed, used and shared. In the skinhead encounter described in J.D.s. the smell of the Doc Marten boots is described as being unique from other boots. The smell of Doc Marten boots then becomes the smell of a skinhead. Combined with the scent of a sweaty sock found in the boots the smell is transformed to a smell of masculinity. The transferring of masculinity to the objects, or their respective aromas, eliminates the *authentic* skinheads from having influence over their artifacts. When a participant in queercore enacts skin drag they are denying skinheads their exclusive claim to the artifacts; the symbols of racism and Nazi ideology are converted to tools of homosexual erotic experience and symbols of an empowered masculinized queer identity.

The denial of control over the artifacts and queering of the masculinity associated with the fetishized symbols of skinhead culture can be carried out in a number of ways. Wearing Doc Martens during same-sex intercourse is similar to enacting skin drag, only in a minimalist way, but there is still an underlying concept of the person being penetrated present. Using the Doc Martens as a symbolic object in a fetishistic masturbatory fantasy and then using the physical boot as a receptacle for the discarded semen penetrates an abstract idea of a skinhead. Control of the identity and possession of the masculinity that grants it power is under the control of the person who is in possession of the symbol.

The use of skin drag and the fetishization of skinhead artifacts are ways in which the skinhead identity is queered and destabilized. These elements work toward the greater objectives of queer identity politics which is to work toward anti-identity, a culture in which categorical identity has little or no meaning and only the meaning created by each individual identity is given cultural weight. For masculinity this would mean not only removing the assumption of heterosexuality from existing models of masculinity, but destroying the categorical label of man.

## QUEER TERRORISM

The politics of queercore are in the category of queer terrorism, seeking to undermine and subvert the control of the hegemon. The lyrical queering of straight macho masculinity and the performance of macho drag are elements of queer terrorism that are implemented through the DIY ethos. The objective of queercore in relation to mainstream masculinity is to subvert and destabilize assumptions between sexuality and gender performance. Destabilizing macho masculine identities by overlaying queer identities on them expands the possibilities for the macho identities and queer identities alike. If the assumption that all cowboys, all skinheads and all other macho masculine identities are straight is broken or placed in doubt, then it becomes possible for a queer individual to be a cowboy or a skinhead or any identity that was previously reserved for a certain heterosexual type of man. Queering of straight macho identities and queer drag are supplemented by other lyrical and behavioral acts of terrorism that are more direct. Queercore uses forms of heterosexist dialog to evoke an emotional or defensive response from mainstream masculinities and rejects forms of gay masculinity that conform to the mainstream templates for masculine behavior.

In queercore it is possible for the meaning and directionality of heterosexist language to be reversed and be turned into an act of terrorism against mainstream masculinity. “Faggot!” - “Queer!” - “Cock-sucker!” are not unfamiliar terms to either straight or queer identified individuals. Men in mainstream masculinities use the terms as components of an informal social sanction system that is sometimes referred to by sociologists as “fag discourse” (Pascoe 330). In the system the adherence to a social group’s standards of masculinity are policed through the temporary assignment of a fag label to any man who deviates from the standards. Typical infractions are showing affection, excessive emotion or physical weakness. Once the label is assigned it is the responsibility of the labeled individual to display an act of macho conformity or pass the label to someone else (Pascoe 335). For individuals who identify as something other than heterosexual the label ceases to be temporary and becomes a continuous punishment and reminder that the individual is not the same as others of their gender. For queercore participants the reminder is not unpleasant and the attempt at punishment is treated as a distinguishing label that can be used to evoke strong reactions from mainstream culture. The hegemon discusses the homosexual as a person to fear, hate and avoid. The fag discourse combined with violence has been used to attempt to deter queer individuals from interacting with society or to encourage them to mask their identity and assimilate in normative culture, supporting and reinforcing the values of dominant society.

In the politics of queercore the labels used for enforcement are reclaimed and used as terms of self-identification without disgrace. A Pansy Division song entitled “Cocksucking Faggot” emphasizes the acceptance of the identity:

“I’m a cocksucking faggot, a flaming faggot  
 A fuck bunny, fruitcake, cum superdeli, homo  
 Uncle Walt, Auntie Mame, little sissy pansy

Fudge-packing butt pirate, drag queen, hairdresser  
 Interior decorator, pervert, pornographer  
 Sodomite, sex fiend, mincing, limpy-wrist  
 Scat-nosed poof prince, a resident of Castro” (Pansy Division, Cocksucking Faggot)

Through an inclusion of an almost exhaustive list of potential names and labels that could be assigned to someone outside of compliance with hegemonic standards of masculinity Pansy Division problematizes the task of selecting a word to use as a derogatory label to deny the person an identity to which they wish to be aligned. The list also forms solidarity across identities that are included in the list. If it is assumed that the speaker in the song does not personally hold each of the identities listed, then the list is used to abstract the identities such as they do hold a commonality. The advantage of a commonality is not in holding a common identity, but in the power of the collective. The hegemon has a group advantage in its own homogeneous formation in mainstream culture, whereas marginalized groups are often socially isolated from each other either because of a lack of identification or the belief that there are no common goals between groups. The importance of the group mentality to queercore is that distinct groups, whether in queercore, other punk cultures or non-affiliated queer identities, can utilize a single concept upon which to confront the hegemon. In “Cocksucking Faggot” after the identities are declared, they are clarified against a list of stereotypes, but then the “cocksucking faggot” identity is thrown back at the hegemon in an attempt to use its own culture of homosexual fear with the line “If you don't watch out this bogeyman will get you, so you say” (Pansy Division, Cocksucking Faggot). The use of “so you say” implies that it is the mainstream construction of the identities listed that makes the worthy of a fearful response. The line is invoked numerous times throughout the song, initially attached to the stereotypes of “cocksucking faggot” preferences and behaviors. Those three words, “so you say”, are used to

link the concepts, drawing the conclusion that both the stereotypes and the fear are the fault of the construction of the “cocksucking faggot” label and stereotype as being a terrifying person.

Jaspir Puar puts forth two concepts with which the dynamic of the situation can be considered. The first is homonationalism, describing the loyalty of a non-straight person to the politics of the heterosexual majority in an attempt to be accepted among the majority as a patriot. The other is the queer terrorist, a monstrous figure which works against the patriotic propaganda of the majority (Puar 371). The politics of queercore are in the category of queer terrorism, seeking to undermine and subvert the control of the hegemon. The lyrics of the boogeyman concept are vaguely terrorist, only fighting back with the tools that have been given through fag discourse and the homosexual fear. The Best Revenge song “Bash Back” is more directly confrontational. The lyrics mention the passing of power from father to son, a reference to the power of masculinity, but then turn on the power structure with “Just wait ‘til they see what we’ve got in store, cause we’re gonna bash back.” (Cimminelli and Knox 68) Most of the tracks produced by Best Revenge focus on themes of revenge, either through the proliferation of queer culture or by not allowing mainstream ideas and hatred ruin the experience of being queer (Cimminelli and Knox 67). Such ideas attack the source of power that is held by mainstream cultures over queercore, essentially utilizing the aggression and violent aspects of mainstream masculinity to threaten and subvert that same masculinity. While not assimilating most other ideas or beliefs about mainstream macho masculinity, aggression is extracted as a potentially valuable tool in enacting terrorism toward straight masculinity.

On occasion the violence and aggression in queercore culture toward mainstream masculinity is not limited to lyrics. At an Extra Fancy performance in 1996 the band had an encounter with a straight heckler who could be described as conforming to the image of a macho

“jock”. The heckler repeatedly shouted “fag” during the performance, much to the annoyance of the band’s lead singer. The lead singer, Brian Grillo, leapt from the stage with the intention of attacking the heckler. Instead the heckler fled the venue. The band continued to perform while the lead singer chased the heckler (Cimminelli and Knox xiv). The encounter inverts the usual public encounter between a hostile heterosexual and a marginalized queer individual. In the presence of the queercore community the presumably heterosexual heckler had no backing of others of a similar identity and was instead surrounded by members of punk culture who sided with the band. Grillo took the aggressive posture, forcing the heckler from the venue in fear of personal injury. In reversing the typical roles Grillo was able to claim a superior position to the heckler which is an act in support of both his queercore identity and his identity as a man. By not allowing the heckler to continue his insults and disruption of the show Grillo defended queercore from a heterosexist attack. The insults of the heckler could be interpreted as invoking “fag discourse” toward Grillo, as a reaction to such an engagement he responded by defending his self-identity as a man and exhibited aggressive macho behavior. While such an expression is outside the context of queercore’s own identity context for masculine behavior, it seems that interactions with external cultures is somewhat different, sometimes relying on the values of the base culture for the purpose of reaffirming the position of queercore. The band continuing to play in Grillo’s absence shows a resolve of queercore, to not be disrupted by hostility or attempts at degrading the experience of the performance for others.

Heterosexual hecklers are not the only group that is in danger of experiencing the wrath of queercore’s defense of its values. Similar to the compliance requirements of mainstream masculinity, queercore implements its own standards for behavior and for identity expression. Just as the hegemon utilizes fag discourse to distance itself from deviant individuals by casting

them into the queer, queercore casts non-deviant individuals into the mainstream. The odd balance in queercore is in welcoming straight individuals who are supportive of queer liberation, while expressing hostility toward individuals who identify as gay or lesbian who embrace mainstream styles of gender or social expression. A frequently cited example of this rejection of normative gay identity is from an issue of BIMBOX, a queercore zine:

“You are entering a gay and lesbian-free zone. ... BIMBOX has transformed into an unstoppable monster, hell-bent on forcibly removing lesbians and gays from non-heterosexual society.

Effective immediately BIMBOX is at war with lesbians and gays. A war in which modern queer boys and queer girls are united against the prehistoric thinking and demented self-serving politics of the above-mentioned scum.” (du Plessis and Chapman)

This declaration of war against lesbians and gays is more than a disagreement of values with a similar, but different, group of people. BIMBOX, as a representative of the queercore community, intentionally formed a rift between gay culture and queercore culture. In stating that the mission of BIMBOX was to forcibly remove lesbians and gays from “non-heterosexual society” they are asserting that queercore is the single legitimate inhabitant of non-heterosexual society. Further, by describing gays and lesbians as “scum” BIMBOX is establishing itself and queercore as superior to gays and lesbians that maintain a closer relationship with mainstream culture. The distancing of gays and lesbians from queercore would relieve queercore of homosexuals who carry mainstream influences into the scene, theoretically providing for a more queer queercore.

The queer terrorist politics utilized by queercore focus on destabilizing identity categories, but also include threats on the mainstream society which threatens. While violence between queercore and mainstream society are not frequent occurrences, the possibility of such

violence indicates that some participants in queercore are unwilling to allow attacks from outside to go without a response.

## CONCLUSION

Through the use of lyrics queercore explores the definitions of masculinity and the value of “macho” displays of masculinity. In the evaluation of macho masculinity and the critique of masculine performance queercore is able to establish its own conception of masculinity. Queercore rejects ideas of masculinity that conform to mainstream ideas and forms its concept of masculinity as deeply linked with queer sexuality, establishing a masculinity that is based more on openness of expression than on any physical parameters or presentation of stereotypical macho traits.

Masculinity in queercore is certainly not free from all attributes of mainstream masculinity as can be seen in the aggression of some of its terrorist activities, but it does utilize lyrics to reject mainstream conceptions of what a man should be and various forms of drag to critique and parody straight macho identities. As a subculture that operates counter to the mainstream base culture it may not be possible for queercore to have an entirely separate experience of masculinity. The queercore experience of masculinity is based on the mainstream masculine experience, but is significantly reinterpreted to accommodate queercore culture.

Queercore reinterprets masculinity in its own context by eliminating the need for macho performance and homophobic or heterosexist attitudes. Through the DIY ethos queercore masculinity is disengaged from capitalism-based status hierarchies and the use of material

symbols of masculinity. Queercore masculinity is far from the hegemon's standard, but it is not an identity that is completely foreign to mainstream observation.

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