

MEN CELEBRATING MASCULINITY:
“BEARS” – JUST AS REGULAR GUYS

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ERKEKLİĞİ KUTLAYAN ERKEKLER:
“AYILAR” – SIRADAN ÇOCUKLAR GİBİ

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- 5) Narsisizm

Anahtar Kelimeler (İngilizce)

- 1) Bear Movement
- 2) Masculinity
- 3) Gay Masculinity
- 4) Fetishism
- 5) Narcissism

Abstract

The present study focuses on “Bears,” who are gay men mostly with hairy, big bodies and facial hair (beards mostly), and who define their identities not only through their bodies but through the content, the ease, the comfort they feel being masculine. Since masculinity is a very key and significant element in Bear peoples’ minds, the project concerns manifestations of Bear masculinity that they highlight so often, with a great care. Moreover, since the notion of masculinity is the most determining factor in their identity formation, a specific importance is given to the analyses of masculinity by taking into account many different masculinities and femininities and analyzing it with regard to sex and sexuality. Furthermore, using psychoanalysis as a methodological tool and Queer theory as a deconstructive strategy the notion of “Bearness” have been investigated in terms of narcissism, fetishism, internalized homophobia and with regard to AIDS and gay media. In addition, since Bear masculinity is regarded as excluding effeminate gay men, anti-effeminate behaviors among Bear subculture have been investigated. What is more, the subversive potentials and the possibilities that the movement can open up or close in terms of gender relations have been argued throughout the study. The hyper-masculine style of Bears compared and contrasted with the hegemonic masculinity and it has been argued that although Bears create new subversive elements, the power relations Bear masculinity reflected help reproducing the hegemonic gendered assumptions. Finally considering gender not as a single identity with fixed meanings but changing both culturally and personally, the study next focuses on Bears from Turkey. The origins and development of Bear movement in Turkey has been explained by making it ‘personal’ by exploring the two Bear magazines and Bear identity and Bear masculinity in Turkish context conjoint with the theoretical questions and ascertainments the work put forward in the previous chapters.

Özet

Mevcut çalışma “Ayılara,” kıllı , iri vücutlu, ve yüz kıllı bulunduran (daha çok sakal) , kendi kimliklerini yalnızca bedenleri üzerinden değil ancak maskülen olmaktan duydukları memnuniyet, rahatlık ve huzur üzerinden tanımlayan erkek eşcinseller üzerine odaklanmaktadır. Maskülenliğin Ayıların zihinlerinde çok önemli ve anahtar bir unsur olması nedeniyle bu proje Ayıların, altlarını her fırsatta çizdikleri maskülenliğin tezahürlerini büyük bir özenle ele almaktadır. Ayrıca maskülenliğin bu insanların kimlik oluşumlarında belirleyici bir unsur olması nedeniyle, maskülenlik analizinin değişik birçok maskülenlikler ve feminenlikler bağlamında ele alınmasına ve cinsiyet ve cinsellikle ilişkilendirilmesine özel bir önem verilmektedir. Metodolojik araç olarak psikanalizi ve yapıbozumcu bir strateji olarak Queer teorisini kullanarak “Ayılık” kavramı narsisizm, fetişizm, içselleştirilmiş homofobi boyutlarında ve AIDS ve eşcinsel medyayla ilişkili olarak sorgulanmıştır. Ayrıca Ayı maskülenliği efemine eşcinsel erkekleri dışlayıcı olarak görüldüğü için, Ayı alt kültürü içindeki efemine karşıtı davranışlar ele alınmıştır. Daha fazlası, çalışma boyunca, toplumsal cinsiyet ilişkileri bağlamında ayı hareketinin önünü açabileceği ya da kapatacağı altüst edici, bozucu potansiyeller ve olabilirlikler üzerinde tartışılmıştır. Ayıların aşırı-erkeksi stilleri egemen maskülenlikle karşılaştırılmış ve kıyaslandırılmış ve Ayıların yeni altüst edici, bozucu unsurlar yaratmalarına rağmen, Ayı maskülenliğinin aksettiği iktidar ilişkilerinin egemen toplumsal cinsiyet varsayımlarını yeniden oluşturmakta yardımcı olduğu tartışılmıştır. Son olarak toplumsal cinsiyeti sabit anlamlarla dolu tek bir kimlikten öte kültürel ve kişisel olarak değişen bir anlamda ele alarak çalışma Türkiye’den ayılara değinmektedir. Türkiye’deki Ayı hareketinin başlangıcı ve gelişmesi iki Ayı dergisinin incelenmesiyle ‘kişisel’ hale getirilmiş ve Türkiye bağlamındaki Ayı kimliği ve Ayı maskülenliği çalışmanın daha önceki bölümlerde ortaya koyduğu teorik sorular ve saptamalarla bir araya getirilmiştir.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this work is to analyze the “Bear movement” (gay men who identify with a ‘masculine’ style, usually with a big, hairy body, facial hair and so called inclusive state of mind) in terms of gender relations by discussing on sex, gender, and sexuality and primarily on masculinity. As a gay sub-culture aroused in early 80’s “Bear movement” a comparatively new, relatively unknown area of academic inquiry did not get much attention neither from the media nor from the academia. Some of the aims of this project are to analyze a sub-culture, which has not been discussed or elaborated much in masculinity or queer studies, to understand what is to be a “Bear,” how Bears define themselves and their identities, the importance of gender in defining one’s sexuality, and investigating the notion of “Bear masculinity” with regard to many different masculinities and femininities and searching for subversive potentialities the movement carry with itself, whether it can be an effective strategy for revealing heterosexuality’s constructed façade or not. The phenomenon will be discussed using different terms such as narcissism, fetishism, homophobia (rather effeminophobia), AIDS, and gay media. Finally an examination of Turkish Bear magazines (Pençe and Beargi) will help the work contextualize the issue and reveal some answers to the suggested questions. Because the concept of masculinity plays an important role in Bear peoples’ identity formation, the notion of masculinity will be discussed in detail in next chapters but first of all, in this introductory chapter the terms sex, gender and sexuality will be analyzed for a better analytic thinking and queer theory as a deconstructive strategy.

Sex, Gender, Sexuality: An Introduction

In this introductory part, the terms sex, gender, sexuality will be examined independently and in relation to each other and the constructed nature of each term will be examined since they act as regulating and oppressive categories in the service of normative, naturalizing heterosexuality to which queer theory's basic premises are directed against. To discuss the terms separately and in relation to each other in analytic thinking is an important point; because of the fact that these terms' usage and analytic relations are slippery if the long lasting and continuing debates revolving around gender studies and between theorists are considered. With keeping in mind that all these terms represent different analytic axes, it should not be underestimated that although they are different, they are interrelated. As Sedgwick puts it for the relation between gender and sexuality, although "every issue of gender would necessarily be embodied through the specificity of a particular sexuality, and vice versa; but none the less there could be use in keeping the analytic axes distinct."¹ This distinction is important because it "has been the rallying cry of a great deal of theory that seeks to complicate hegemonic assumptions about the continuities of anatomical sex, social gender, gender identity, sexual identity, sexual object choice and sexual practice."² If, for instance, we think about lesbian feminism, should we think about oppression of lesbians in terms of oppression of women or oppression of lesbians as queers? For such reasons as Rubin suggests "it is essential to

¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 27-35.

² Biddy Martin, "Sexualities without Genders and Other Queer Utopias." *Diacritics* 24: 2/3, Critical Crossings (Summer – Autumn, 1994), p. 105.

separate gender and sexuality analytically to reflect more accurately their separate social existences.”³

Thus, my first aim is to present and discuss some theoretical explanations for the notions of sex, gender and sexuality, the relational positionalities of the terms that have been used and still being used to explain certain kinds of attitudes, identities, lifestyles, desires through binary oppositions (male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual) which is not sufficient neither to capture a coherent and comprehensive understanding of sexual politics at all nor to lead emancipatory, inclusive possibilities for diversities among and within people. To open up new possibilities not only for sex, gender, sexuality but for other regulatory modalities as well, that dichotomized aspects of each term should elaborately be investigated to push the boundaries further and to loosen any fixed identity category’s strong claims of fixity and naturalness and for a better articulation of ideas. For that reason the binary structure of these norms will be questioned with respect to heterosexuality.

Reiteration of Gender as “Performativity”

Gender, according to Butler is the performative effect of reiterative acts, acts that can be, and are, repeated. These acts, which are repeated in and through a highly rigid regulatory frame, “congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of

³ Gayle Rubin. “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality” in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance. (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) p. 308.

being” and “create the illusion of an innate and stable gender core.”⁴ This is because for Butler, gender is a vehicle for heterosexuality to remain intact, by “citing” the norms that have been given an illusion of an essential sort of being. I’ll turn back the issue of heterosexuality later with the discussion of queer theory as a strategy for fighting against any kinds of normalizing, dominating, oppressive systems.

If it is assumed in a broad sense that gender is culturally as well politically constructed, the constructed nature of gender is theorized as independent of sex, then gender becomes a “free floating artifice”⁵ as Butler puts it, “with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just be easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one.” This is not to mean that gender is to culture as sex is to nature, “gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which “sexed nature” or “natural sex” is produced and established as “prediscursive” prior to culture [...].⁶

The notion of “sex” is at the beginning, normative; it is as Foucault has called a “regulatory ideal.” What this suggests is that “sex” not only functions as a norm, but it is a part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs. In Butler’s word “sex’ is an ideal construct which is materialized through time.”⁷ That means, sex works by materializing the *body’s* sex and sexual difference for the sake of “heterosexual imperative.”⁸ In this context sex is already gendered and, according the Butler, the

⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 33.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

subject “emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves.”⁹ She further claims that gender operates through exclusionary means because the subject assumes a sex and heterosexual imperative while enabling certain kinds of sexed identifications, forecloses other identifications. Thus, being a man or being a woman requires adapting some identifications because the “law” remains a law to the extent that differentiated “citations” called masculine or feminine are compelled as certain approximations. Gender norms work by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity that are related to the idealization of heterosexuality. That aspect of gender identity requires that certain kinds of “identities” cannot exist – when gender does not follow from sex and desire do not follow from either sex or gender. What is important here is the fact that the relationship between gender and sexuality is negotiated through identification and desire. In the heterosexual logic identification and desire must be mutually exclusive. So in this binary system the masculine term is differentiated from the feminine term in order to consolidate each term and the internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire through the practices of heterosexual desire. Butler calls this as “performativity” which is the “regularized and constrained repetition of norms” under and “through the force of prohibition and taboo”¹⁰ that acquires an act-like status. Her famous illustration of drag reveals what she means by (heterosexual) performativity. Drag:

[A]llegorizes heterosexual melancholy, the melancholy by which a masculine gender is formed from the refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love; a feminine gender is formed (taken on, assumed) through the incorporative fantasy by which the

⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰ Ibid., 95.

feminine is excluded as a possible object of love, an exclusion never grieved, but “preserved” through the heightening of feminine identification itself.¹¹

In her account, homosexual desires are proscribed from the start within heterosexual matrix, which is because of the absence of cultural conventions to avow the loss of homosexual love, which “produces a culture of heterosexual melancholy.”¹² Drag also shows that the performer impersonates the impersonation, an idealization of gender, which is not real or original.

What Butler suggests is that, gender as a social construct divides man and woman and attributes the “citation” of masculinity to man and femininity to woman, in which identification and desire are mutually exclusive that if one identifies as a given gender, one must desire a different gender. And this citationality is done by the reiteration of the norms, which then takes the appearance of realness or materialization in the service of heterosexuality. In this respect in heterosexual matrix gender is used as a tool to make heterosexuality seem natural, real, the norm. Sex, gender, and desire are unified through the representation of heterosexuality as primary and foundational. This is a point Butler depicted clearly and Sedgwick and queer theory take a rallying point.

¹¹ Ibid., 235.

¹² Ibid., 236.

Gender and Sexuality: Separating Conjoint Terms

Gender, according to Sedgwick, is “the far more elaborated, more fully and rigidly dichotomized social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviors”¹³ which is culturally changeable, diverse, and relational and she further claims that “sexuality extends along so many dimensions that aren’t well described in terms of *gender of object choice* at all”¹⁴ which is an influential and innovative idea that is close to the understanding of queer theory. In *The Epistemology of the Closet* Sedgwick, claiming that such forms of designation reaffirm, rather than challenge, heteronormative logic and institutions, writes:

It is a rather amazing fact that, of the very many dimensions along which the genital activity of one person can be differentiated from that of another (dimensions that include preferences for certain acts, certain zones of sensations, certain physical types, a certain frequency, certain symbolic investments, certain relations of age and power, a certain species, a certain number of participants, and so on) precisely one, the gender of the object choice, emerged from the turn of the century, and has remained, as *the* dimension denoted by the now ubiquitous category of “sexual orientation.”¹⁵

Thus, the gender of the object choice becomes the decisive characteristic in defining one’s sexuality. In this respect categories like lesbian, gay man, and heterosexual are limited and limiting as categories of sexual identification. The gender of the object choice

¹³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990c), p. 27.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35 (italics added)

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

is one among the many other dimensions of sexuality and which may according to Sedgwick “distinguish object choice quite differently (e.g., human/animal, adult/child, singular/plural, autoerotic/alloerotic) or are not even about object choice (e.g., orgasmic/nonorgasmic, noncommercial/commercial, using bodies only/using manufactured objects, in private/in public, spontaneous/scripted)”¹⁶ What this account suggests is that gender and sexuality are not *necessarily* linked to each other and the identity categories are not natural, essential or fixed but rather imaginary and fantasmatic. This explanation of Sedgwick not only reveals other sexual practices which are not determined by the gender of the object choice (e.g., S/M, bisexuality, fisting), but also problematizes the heterosexist understanding of desire and identification as mutually exclusive and loosens the connection of gender and sexuality by opening up further possibilities even in sexualities which is defined by gender (let’s say masculine or effeminate gay men, lipstick/butch lesbians, lesbian MTF transsexuals etc...)

Because gender of the object is one of the many dimensions of sexuality, masculinity and femininity are not natural attributes to *heterosexual* men and women respectively and as David Halperin suggests “sexual object-choice might be wholly independent of such “secondary” characteristics as masculinity and femininity”.¹⁷ Here I want to make an important point because when we try to separate sexuality and gender we should not forget that there are other determinants such as class and race. As Sedgwick puts it “to assume the distinctiveness of the *intimacy* between sexuality and gender might well risk assuming too much about the definitional *separability* of either of them from

¹⁶ Ibid., 35.

¹⁷ David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love*. (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 16.

determinations of, say, class or race...”¹⁸ Still, gender and sexuality reveals two analytic axes that may be imagined as being distinct from one another as gender and class or class and ethnicity.

In short we reach the conclusion that gender and sexuality are two different axes that have no innate relationship in terms of defining one another. Rather, gender of object choice is picked up among many other dimensions to define sexuality that act as a regulating and normalizing principle under the appearance of “norm” in a heterosexualized desire which is to materialize heterosexuality even at the sites of bodies. Defining sexuality only in relation to gender of the object choice is very limiting and insufficient to understand the complex dynamics lying under the concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality. Objecting any kinds of fixed, naturalizing identities, queer theory tries to problematize this issue.

Queer Theory: Destabilizing the Norm(al)

Unlike the terms gay and lesbian, queer (theory) is not gender specific. It tries to dethrone gender as the significant marker of sexual identity. The fact that gender is not the only significant marker of sexual difference, claimed by Sedgwick is an important one and it deserves further development and reiteration. Hence Queer Theory supports Sedgwick with its de-emphasis on the decisive character of gender on sexuality. As Suzanna D.

Walters puts it:

¹⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990c), pp. 30-31.

Queerness is something that is ultimately beyond gender – it is an attitude, a way of responding, that begins in a place not concerned with, or limited by, notions of a binary opposition of male and female or the homo versus hetero paradigm usually articulated as an extension of this gender binarism.¹⁹

The connotation of queerness with homosexuality is a failed one because queer theory is against any kind of fixed identities that gives primary importance to gender. Queer theory without wishing to define itself, unites all the heterogeneous desires and interests that are marginalized and excluded in the straight and gay mainstream. “Queers are not united by any unitary identity but only by their opposition to disciplining, normalizing social forces.”²⁰

Queerness is not an identity because all identities are purchased at the price of a logic of hierarchy, exclusion, normalization, subordination, and discipline. Queer as a linguistic practice re-produces a subject position, whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names. In that way it is a political strategy. The subject who has been *queered* by homophobic and heterosexist interpellations, “*takes up* or *cites* that very term” as a basis for political action by theatrically miming and rendering the “discursive convention” hyperbolic.²¹ Queer theory not only opposes heterosexuality, but any kind of

¹⁹ Suzanna Danuta Walters, “From Here To Queer” in *QueerTheory*. Ed. Morland, Iain & Willox, Annabelle (Houndmills [England] ; New York : Palgrave Macmillan. 2005), p. 13.

²⁰ Steven Seidman, “Identity and Politics in a ‘Postmodern’ Gay Culture,” in *Fear of a Queer Planet : Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, c1994), p.133.

²¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 232.

normalizing strategy. In a Foucauldian way it argues that there are no objective or universal truths, but particular forms of knowledge that become “naturalized” in culturally and historically specific ways. A beautiful definition comes from David Halperin who states:

[Q]ueer does not name some natural kind or refer to some determined object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence.²²

Thus queer theory works actively and explicitly to challenge any attempt to render “identity” singular, fixed, essential or normal. It tries re-ordering the relations among forms of knowledge, practices, (erotic) identities, sexual behaviors, gender construction, social institutions and relations by considering the relations among power, desire and the truth (regime of the normal). It “constitutes a kind of activism that attacks the dominant notion of the natural. The queer is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny.”²³ So, as it has been revealed, it is not an essential identity but rather a (political) position not restricted to gays and lesbians only, but for anyone who feels marginalized because of their sexual practices. It “provides a powerful vantage point from which to interrogate and destabilize normativity.”²⁴

²² David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 61.

²³ Sue-Ellen Case, quoted in Donald H. Hall, *Queer Theories*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York : Palgrave Macmillan. 2003, p. 55.

²⁴ George Chauncey, “The Queer History and Politics of Lesbian and Gay Studies.” *Queer Frontiers: Millennial Geographies, Genders, and Generations*. Ed. Joseph A. Boone, Martin Dupuis, Martin Meeker,

Queer Theory's objection of fixed identities has been critiqued by many theorists for its erasure of the specificity of let's say lesbianism or gayness, and veiling over the differences between sexualities (And further it is claimed that Queer Theory ignores differences of class, race, age and so on, in a male dominated agenda. It has been accused of being male-centered, anti-feminist, and race-blind). So the question is whether identity categories are regulating and naturalizing or whether they have the potential to open up new possibilities? I believe that erasing all categories of identities would be an impossible task and what should be done is to negotiate with identities, showing their limited essence, how they regulated and contested, because identity categories are not only disciplining and regulating in an oppressive way, but they are also socially and politically, as well as, personally enabling and/or productive of moral bonds, political agency, and social collectivities. If we talk about gender identities, certain kinds of them fail to conform to the norms and they appear as failures. But "their persistence and proliferation, however, provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims (...) and, hence, open up (...) rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder."²⁵ What I believe is that queer theory's most ultimate goal is not to dethrone all kinds of identities but to dethrone gender as the primary determinant of sexual behavior. It calls "for a celebration of a diversity of identities, but also for a cultural diversity that surpasses the notion of identity."²⁶ It aims at changing the ideas about gender and sexuality by exposing "queer cracks in the heteronormative façade" and also "de-

Karin Quimby, Cindy Sarver, Debra Silverman, Rosemary Weatherston (The University of Wisconsin Press. 2000), p.304.

²⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p.19.

²⁶ Iain Morland and Annabelle Willox (ed), Introduction in *Queer Theory*. (Houndmills [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p..3.

centering those regimes of ‘normality’ that bear on the sexual and gender status quo,²⁷ by “queering.”

“Queering”: A Deconstructive Strategy

One way of going beyond the arguments about identity is that, it may be more productive to think the notion of queer as a verb, rather than a noun. Queer in this sense becomes a deconstructive practice not as an identity, but as a subversive subject-position and political strategy, which “aims to denaturalize heteronormative understanding of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality, and the relations between them.”²⁸ Queering the straight sex can allow us the possibility of moving away from stabilized notions of gender and sexuality. “It transcends labels of male, female, homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual, transsexual, etc., opting instead to consider gender identity and sexual orientation as culturally invented, fluid, eternally unstable constructs that derive what meaning they have from their context.”²⁹ By doing that it suggests/reminds us of “the truly polymorphous nature of our difference.”³⁰

To explain sexuality in terms of binary oppositions is too limited because sexuality brings

²⁷ Adam Isaiah Green, “Gay but Not Queer: Toward a Post-Queer Study of Sexuality.” *Theory and Society* 31: 4 (Aug., 2002): 521-45. p. 522.

²⁸ Niki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 50.

²⁹ Shari L. Thurer, *The End of Gender: A Psychological Autopsy* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p.97.

³⁰ Suzanna Danuta Walters, “From Here To Queer” in *Queer Theory*. Ed. Morland, Iain & Willox, Annabelle (Houndmills [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2005), p.7

into play a great many diversities of conjugated becomings. Instead of living in a world of fixed boundaries with un-crossable borders, it would be much better to look “for a transitional territory in which the conventional opposites create movable walls and pleasurable tension.”³¹ Any kinds of identity is not fixed, never fully made, never stable, and continuously multiplying and fracturing. An identity is always haunted by the other, not only because it elicits otherness but also because it is an occasion of continuing social struggle. By naming itself “queer,” Queer Theory is objected to any kinds of so-called fixed identities, and any “idea(l) of normal behavior” (e.g., heteronormativity).

And finally while Queer Theory has been discussed with regard to gender and sexuality, it is important to emphasize that when one takes a closer look at coalitions among individuals whose commonality is based on their oppression in terms of sexual activity it becomes an insufficient one since there are other dimensions such as race, class, age, able-bodiedness and that each axes cannot be isolated since they are *intersecting* and mutually inflecting. Lastly, as Jay Prosser claimed “normalizing the queer would be its said finish.”³²

So far this chapter relied upon Queer Theory as a deconstructive, denaturalizing strategy as a methodological tool. Other than queer theory this work will borrow some terms from psychoanalysis, which will be used as a tool for elaborating on the issues of “Bearness,”

³¹ Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 1995), p.80.

³² Jay Prosser, *Second Skins : The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1998), p.58.

“masculinity,” “(gender/sexual) identity” and further, to have a better understanding of the big picture. The general objectives of this work will be whether “Bear phenomenon” creates a subversive potential as a strategy revealing the constructed nature of gender and particularly of masculinity, whether it denaturalizes heterosexuality or not, the possibilities and impossibilities of “gay masculinity,” and the importance of gender in sexual identity. The study also suggests that it is not appropriate to focus on only subversive elements in the Bear context. Rather what structures does Bear masculinity privilege or challenge, what kinds of systems of power are revealed in this account is also important to investigate.

Since there are not much theoretical writings, discussions, and debates particularly about the issue of “Bear Movement,” this thesis will be a modest one in its effort to investigate this phenomenon. Rather than putting the issue on a highly- elaborated theoretical agenda, this work should be regarded as a beginning of a critical study of Bear people, which aims at raising different questions about the arguments revolving around gender/masculinity/queer studies. It will also be a beginning for the discussion of “Bear Movement” in the Turkish context since the last chapter will be about some Bear voices from Turkey by investigating Bear history and media.

2. MASCULINITIES

“Unchallenged male supremacy is one of the major obstacles to any real progress in this part of the world”³³

Research into men and masculinities has been one of the growth areas of sociological enquiry for the last decades. Not only an analysis of men and masculinities enhanced our understanding of power relations of gender and sexuality, but it also helped us to see different masculinities and their constructed, changing nature. As Connell puts it:

We must focus on the social dynamics generated *within* gender relations. The gender order itself is the site of relations of dominance and subordination, struggles for hegemony, and practices of resistance.³⁴

In this chapter my aim will be to give a detailed analysis of the notion of “masculinity” by considering it as a social construct which change over time and *between* and *within* gender relations, and revealing its relation with heterosexuality and other(ed) sexualities and masculinities such as gay male and female masculinities and finally to give account of gay male masculinities with a special consideration.

³³ R.W. Connell. . “The Big Picture: Masculinities in Recent World History.” *Theory and Society* 22: 5, Special Issue: Masculinities. (Oct., 1993): 597-623, p.603.

³⁴ R. W. Connell. “A Very Straight Gay: Masculinity, Homosexual Experience, and The Dynamics of Gender.” *American Sociological Review* 57: 6 (Dec., 1992), p.735.

Before going further I want to make one issue clear. Using the term “masculinities” is not reducing the sociology of masculinity to a postmodern uncertainty or a “kaleidoscope of lifestyles”³⁵ but rather showing the *relational* character of gender, which means that different (differing) masculinities are constituted in relation to other masculinities and femininities. Thus a “particular masculinity” is not constituted in isolation *but* in relation to other masculinities and to femininities. To understand homosexual masculinities we must focus on heterosexual masculinities and other masculinities as well. As a result we should locate “man and masculinities as power relations, including power relations with women, young people, and other men.”³⁶ I believe that Butler’s account of gender melancholia will be a useful vantage point to see the relation between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Gender Melancholy

For Butler gender is achieved and stabilized through the accomplishment of heterosexual positioning and certain types of disavowals and repudiations organize the “performance” of gender and this gender performativity is related to gender melancholia. In “Melancholia Gender/Refused Identification,” going through a Freudian reading, she defines melancholy as “an unfinished process of grieving which is central to the formation of identifications which form the ego itself”³⁷ which is central to the process

³⁵ Ibid., (736)

³⁶ Jeff Hearn and David Li. Collinson. “Theorizing Unities and Differences Between Men and Between Masculinities” *Theorizing Masculinities*. Ed. Harry Brod, Michael Kaufman (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1994), p.98.

whereby the gendered character of ego is assumed.

According to Butler, heterosexual identity is obtained through a melancholic incorporation of the love it disavows. “The man who insists upon the coherence of his heterosexuality will claim that he never loved another man, and hence never lost another man.”³⁸ This is an identity based upon the rejection to acknowledge an attachment, and, hence the denunciation to grieve. Thus, homosexuality within heterosexuality is an “ungrievable loss” and an “unlivable passion” and its prohibition is the basic promise of a heterosexual identity. So according to Butler “masculinity” and “femininity” are the reflection of that ungrieved love:

When the prohibition against homosexuality is culturally pervasive, then the “loss” of homosexual love is precipitated through a prohibition which is repeated and ritualized throughout the culture. What ensues is a culture of gender melancholy in which masculinity and femininity emerges as the traces of an ungrieved and ungrievable love, indeed, where masculinity and femininity within the heterosexual matrix are strengthened through the repudiations they perform.³⁹

So Butler’s understanding of “masculinity” and “femininity” reflect the melancholic aspect of heterosexual identity in a double denial (not be avowed, and not be grieved and this never-never situation naturalizes heterosexuality). The prohibition on homosexuality *preempts* the process of grief, which results a melancholic identification. In this context masculinity and femininity are not dispositions but accomplishments “with the

³⁷ Judith Butler. “Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification.” *Constructing Masculinity*. Ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, Simon Watson (New York : Routledge, 1995), p.22.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

achievements of heterosexuality.”⁴⁰ And this achievement of heterosexuality depends on homosexuality:

[F]or heterosexuality to remain intact as a distinct social form, it *requires* an intelligible conception of homosexuality and also requires the prohibition of that conception in rendering it culturally unintelligible.⁴¹

Thus, masculinity and femininity proceeds through the accomplishment of an always tenuous (compulsory) heterosexuality, which abandons homosexual attachments. Gender is produced as a ritualized reiteration of principles, and this ritual is socially obligated in part by the compel of compulsory heterosexuality. If we remember what she says about drag that the previous chapter pointed out, she claims that drag reflects the heterosexual melancholy, a melancholy in which “a masculine gender is formed through the refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love; a feminine gender is formed (taken on, assumed) through the incorporative fantasy by which the feminine is excluded as a possible object of love.” What drag exposes is the imitative structure of gender, revealing gender as an imitation.

The important thing in Butler’s account lies in her understanding of “cultural conventions.” Gender is produced as a ritualized recurrence of *conventions* that is *socially compelled* by the force of compulsory heterosexuality. According to her, because of the lack/absence of cultural conventions for homosexuality to remain a possible love-

⁴⁰ Ibid., 24.

⁴¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p.77.

object in turn produces “a culture of heterosexual melancholy.”⁴² This lack of cultural conventions is produced at the expense of *rendering* homosexuality and femininity as inferior other.

Going through a Lacanian reading, Butler tries to explain masculinity in relation to phallus, which signifies “the persistence of straight mind” and further “a masculine or heterosexist identification.”⁴³ For Lacan women are in the position of *being* the phallus whereas men *have* the phallus. To be the phallus according to Lacan is to be the signifier of the desire of the Other and to come into sight as this signifier.⁴⁴ Power is exerted by the feminine position of *not having*, that the masculine subject who has the phallus necessitates this Other to validate his power. According to Butler’s view if we assume that phallus is a privileged signifier, it gets that privilege through being repeated and for Lacan if the symbolic position that marks a sex as masculine is one through which the masculine sex is said to “have the phallus”; it is one that obliges through the threat of punishment, which is “the threat of feminization, an imaginary and inadequate identification.”⁴⁵ Thus, men *become* men by approximating the “having the phallus” in a heterosexual matrix. In this account, the feminine site is constituted as the figural endorsement of that punishment and as a lack with regard to the masculine subject.

⁴² Judith Butler, “Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification.” *Constructing Masculinity*. Ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, Simon Watson (New York : Routledge, 1995), p.34.

⁴³ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 86.

⁴⁴ Jacques Lacan, “The Signification of the Phallus.” *Ecrits: A Selection*. Translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge Classics 2001), pp. 281-291.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, (101)

Furthermore this account is psychosocial since the phallus, the master signifier, the cultural power, which is symbolized in language, is inherently social.

To sum up, what we learn from Butler is that, gender is a social construct and the notions of “masculinity” and “femininity” reflect the compulsory nature of heterosexuality (heterosexual melancholy), which renders homosexuality as unintelligible and forecloses it from the start (where the cultural conventions are enforcing), and hence, puts the feminine position as the site of lack (castration). What we understand is, masculinity, as a social construct requires homosexuality and femininity to remain intact. Becoming a “man” within this logic requires a repudiation of femininity and homosexuality associated with it, which are socially *devalued*. The very figuration of castration *threat* is produced as a lack *only* in relation to the masculine subject. Because, as Butler puts it “an identification always take place in relation to a law or, more specifically, a prohibition that works through delivering a threat of punishment.”⁴⁶ Following this psychosocial investigation, now I will turn to more social definitions of masculinities.

Masculinities: Social Definitions

The term “masculinities” is used by Connell, who observes that at any given historical moment there are various and competing *masculinities*.⁴⁷ Thus, masculinities are not fixed but they change over time, over space and during the lives of men themselves. This premise forecloses any assumption of a crisis in masculinity since a crisis means it to be

⁴⁶ Ibid, (105)

⁴⁷ See R. W. Connell. *Masculinities* (University of California Press, 1985)

something fixed, solid or immovable. Far from being in a crisis, masculinity is multiple, complex and political. As I underlined in the previous chapter, poststructuralism and Queer theory can be seen as a general criticism of fixed categories and categoricalism in theorizing gender. Thus, thinking masculinity in a plural form will give us an analytical advantage for exploring the phenomenon.

First of all I want to make it clear that masculinities are discursive products, which are produced institutionally as much as they are the aspects of personality, and interpersonal relations. As Connell puts it:

Masculinity as personal practice cannot be isolated from its institutional context. Most human activity is institutionally bound. Three institutions – the state, the workplace/labour market, and the family – are of particular importance in the contemporary organization of gender.⁴⁸

Thus, masculinities are social products, which are “institutionally bound” and constantly changing collection of meanings that we construct through our relationships with ourselves with each other and with our world. They exist in specific cultural and organizational settings, which are commonly related with males and thus culturally defined as *not* feminine. Masculinity or the male identity is *achieved* by the constant process of warding off threats to it. It is precariously achieved by the *rejection* of “femininity” and “homosexuality.” Because an identity is always already haunted by the other, by that which is not “I.” As Steven Seidman says “to the extent that *identity* always

⁴⁸ R. W. Connell. “The Big Picture: Masculinities in Recent World History.” *Theory and Society* 22: 5, Special Issue: Masculinities. (Oct., 1993), p. 602.

contains the specter of *non-identity* within it, the subject is always divided and identity is always purchased at the price of the exclusion of the Other, the repression or repudiation of non-identity.”⁴⁹ Thus, masculinity has meaning only in relation to femininity and other masculinities, like heterosexuality has meaning only in relation to “homosexuality”; the consistency, unity of the former is built on barring, repression, and repudiation of the latter. These terms form an inter-reliant, hierarchical relation of signification. So identity requires differences in order to be, and converts differences into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty “through a repudiation which produces a domain of abjection, a repudiation without which the subject cannot emerge.”⁵⁰ In this sense individual identity says as much about who one is not, as it does about who one is. Masculinity, therefore, does not exist in isolation from femininity – it will always be an expression of the current image that men have of themselves in relation to women. It is the “relentless repudiation of the feminine.”⁵¹ It is an identity not in the direct affirmation of the masculine but which is born in the renunciation of the feminine. “Whatever the variations by race, class, age, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, being a man means ‘not being like women.’”⁵² Consequently, masculinity is an anti-identity and being seen as non-masculine, on any level, allows for a connection with femininity. And because gay man seen as non-masculine, they are associated with femininity. Since masculinity is

⁴⁹ Steven Seidman. “Identity and Politics in a ‘Postmodern’ Gay Culture”. *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, c1994), p. 130.

⁵⁰ Judith Butler. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 3.

⁵¹ Michael S. Kimmel. “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity.” in *The Masculinities Reader* (Cambridge, UK : Polity ; Malden, MA : Blackwell Publishers, 2001), p. 272.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 272.

inherently linked with the institution of heterosexuality, the heterosexual matrix defines homosexuals as non-masculine. In this context, masculinity is a dilemma for gay men, and it also seems to be completely antithetical to the homosexual's existence, in that masculinity is seen as strictly heterosexual. Thus, gay men are seen as failing in the attempt of embodying masculinity. Keeping in mind masculinity as a total rejection of anything feminine or homosexual, the analysis of men and masculinities is likely to be enhanced when the relation to women and femininity is acknowledged. Furthermore, the relation between heterosexual and homosexual men have to be studied to understand the constitution of masculinity as a political order, and the question of what forms of masculinity are socially dominant or hegemonic has to be explored. For these reasons, the analysis now will focus on the concept of "hegemonic masculinity."

Hegemonic Masculinity

Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice, which embodies the currently excepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees [...] the dominant position of men and the subordination of women."⁵³ It is a particular range of masculinity to which other masculinities—among them young and effeminate as well as homosexual men's—subordinated. Hegemony, in this respect refers to a historical situation, a set of circumstances in which power is won and held. It is the preservation of practices that institutionalize men's authority over women and connected to men and to subordinate other masculinities as well. As Messner states:

⁵³ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (University of California Press, 1985), p. 77.

Hegemonic masculinity is a successful strategy for the domination of women, and it is also constructed in relation to various marginalized and subordinated masculinities (e.g., gay, black, and working-class masculinities).⁵⁴

On the other hand hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given model of gender relations, a position always contestable. To illustrate, in the Renaissance Europe a passion for beautiful boys was compatible with hegemonic masculinity but today no such passion has a hegemonic position.⁵⁵ On the contrary masculinity became the exact opposition of homosexuality. A consideration of homosexuality thus provides the beginnings of a dynamic conception of masculinity as a structure of social relations. By searching for the possibility of gay masculinities a more complete, unbiased understanding of gender relations is possible. We can reach a better understanding of masculinity by contrasting different types of masculinities. As Lynne Segal:

We need to focus on *differences* between men, and the situations men find themselves in, if we are to see how to struggle for change. This is why it is important to explore differing masculinities *and* their social and political contexts.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Michael A. Messner, *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movement* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 8.

⁵⁵ For instance such a passion for beautiful boys is not about gender but mostly about class. Thus, there was not such a strong connection with gender and sexuality, where a passion for beautiful boys revealed class differences within hegemonic masculinity. Halperin, in *One Hundred Years Of Homosexuality*, explores adult male sexuality during the Classical Era, and he concludes that it had much more to do with power status and social positioning than it did with any expression of identity-determining desire for the same sex.

For those reasons, it is time to have a look at “gay masculinities” which after the account previously given about masculinity, seems like an oxymoron.

Gay Masculinities: Capitalism / Patriarchy

“An understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition.”

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*.

As previously stated the hegemonic masculinity is a heterosexist one, which defines homosexuality synonymous with being “effeminate,” “sissy” or womanlike. This is a cultural melancholia, as Butler put it, in which “the potential for homoerotic pleasure was expelled from the masculine and located in a deviant group.”⁵⁷ But why there is not a possibility of homosexual object choice as a possible love object for everyone? Why heterosexuality is compulsory, pervasive and *subjects* homosexuality? One answer comes from John D’Emilio:

the elevation of the family to ideological preeminence guarantees that capitalist society will reproduce not just children, but heterosexism and homophobia. In the most profound sense capitalism is the problem.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Lynne Segal, Changing Men, “Changing Men: Masculinities in Context.” *Theory and Society* 22: 5, Special Issue: Masculinities, 1993: 630.

⁵⁷ R. W. Connell, “The Big Picture: Masculinities in Recent World History.” *Theory and Society* 22: 5, Special Issue: Masculinities. (Oct., 1993): 611.

In this respect we can see heterosexuality and masculinity as an ideology produced by men as a result of the threat to pose to the survival of the patriarchal sexual division of labor by the rise of modernity. If we go back to the nineteenth century there was “no category of homosexuality [...] and sexual orientation at the same time did not signal a sexual or social identity.”⁵⁹ Thus the notions of homosexuality and heterosexuality emerged in the course of modernity. For instance where in a heterosexual context effeminacy is unattainable and excluded, effeminacy didn’t correlate with gayness; “in the time of Shakespeare and Milton it meant paying too much attention to women.”⁶⁰ That means, the concept of “masculinity” is a changing one and with the rise of modernity and capitalist societies it became the representation of a heterosexual desire in a binary opposition for the sake of capitalism to remain intact. John D’Emilio asserts that:

The expansion of capital and the spread of labor have effected a profound transformation in the structure and functions of the nuclear family, the ideology of the family life, and the meaning of heterosexual relations. It is these changes in the family that are most directly linked to the appearance of a collective gay life.⁶¹

What D’Emilio suggests is that whereas capitalism made the emergence of a gay identity possible it didn’t accept gay men and lesbians in its midst. And he finds the answer in the

⁵⁸ John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in *The Gender / Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy*. Ed. Roger N. Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), p. 175.

⁵⁹ Steven Seidman, “Identity and Politics in a ‘Postmodern’ Gay Culture,” in *Fear of a Queer Planet : Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, c1994), p. 126.

⁶⁰ Alan Sinfield, *On Sexuality and Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 99.

⁶¹ John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in *The Gender / Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy*. Ed. Roger N. Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), p. 170.

contradictory relationship of capitalism to the family. For that reason his political agenda contains structures and programs, which help us providing a sense of belonging other than the nuclear family thereby working on way which will be useful in its waning of significance. In a Foucauldian sense the relations of power are productive. In this case the prohibitive law against homosexuality opens a space for gay and lesbian identities, that's why it is productive. It is both disciplining and productive since it enables social collectivities, moral bonds and political agency. D'Emilio's political agenda suggests that:

Already excluded from families as most of us are, we have to create, for our survival, networks of support that do not depend on the bonds of blood or the license of the state, but that are freely chosen and nurtured. The building of an "affectional community" must be as much a part of our political movement as are campaigns for civil rights. In this way we may prefigure the shape of personal relationship in a society grounded in equality and justice rather than exploitation and oppression, a society where autonomy and security do not preclude each other but coexists.⁶²

So what Butler meant by the absence of cultural conventions for avowing homosexual love, in this account, stems from the capitalist production and maintenance a nuclear family. In *Gender trouble*, Butler also explains gender division in terms of economic reasons where she states that:

There is no reason to divide up human bodies into male and female sexes except that such a division suits the economic needs of heterosexuality and lends a naturalistic gloss to the

⁶² Ibid.,176.

institution of heterosexuality.⁶³

After underlining the reasons why homosexuals are excluded as the deviant Other, now I will turn to the notion of gay masculinities regarding whether it is a *parody* or a *copy* of heterosexual desires in homosexual contexts, whether it is *subversive* or *submissive*, how does it operate, and what is the connection between homosexual and heterosexual masculinities.

Gay Masculinities vs. Hegemonic Masculinities

Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity. If gender norms function by requiring the “personification” of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, they are “almost always related to the idealization of the heterosexual bond.” That’s why “gay masculinity” sounds like an oxymoron in the first glance.

Homophobia is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood.

Homophobia, as the fear of being seen as a sissy, dominates the cultural definitions of masculinity⁶⁴, which was not predated by heterosexuality but “historically produced *along with it.*”⁶⁵ Thus, claiming a position in a heterosexual setting by identifying with a

⁶³ Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 112.

⁶⁴ Michael Kimmel, “Masculinity as Homophobia : Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity.” in *The Masculinities Reader* (Cambridge, UK : Polity ; Malden, MA : Blackwell Publishers, 2001), pp. 277-79.

masculine style among gay men seems problematic, since masculinity is a vehicle for heterosexuality to make itself natural in a *homophobic* way. So what it means of gay men adopting heterosexual desires operating in their identity formation? Is it a subversive act revealing heterosexuality's claim of fixity, essence or is it an emulation / eroticisation / fantasy of masculinity? Does the *gay masculinity performativity* open new "queer" spaces for a proliferation of multiple identities by revealing / challenging the limits of regulatory aspect of cultural intelligibility and bringing gender categories into question in a subversive manner or does it serve to reiterate and consolidate the very oppressive gender system by transposing and magnifying the heterosexist logic? These are important questions to understand the underlying assumptions regarding gay masculinities since heterosexual desires operate in homosexuality *may* strengthen the heterosexual norms *without* calling them into question even it tries to denaturalize them.

To elaborate on these questions the study will focus on the butch/femme positions, which are regarded as copying the heterosexual norms and so *reconsolidating* the gender inequality, and on the other hand, which are considered as *denaturalizing*, *queering* the heterosexual matrix. The understanding of butch-femme relations may be a significant vantage point for a better consideration about Bear phenomenon.

⁶⁵ R.W. Connell, "A Very Straight Gay: Masculinity, Homosexual Experience, and The Dynamics of Gender." *American Sociological Review* 57: 6 (Dec., 1992), p. 736.

Butch-Femme Relations: Heterosexual Copies?

It has been argued by many theorists that butch-femme relations may simply replicate(d) heterosexual relations⁶⁶, that the butch is the masculine and the femme is the feminine one, copying the roles in heterosexuality, thus strengthening heterosexuality and its heterosexist ideology. On the other hand, other accounts reveal that these forms of lesbian gendering are not the same as male/female but on the contrary they bring gender categories into question by challenging heterosexuality and heteronormativity.

The similarities between butch-femme relations and heterosexuality include the centrality of gender polarity, the responsibility of the “masculine” partner to sexually please the “feminine” partner, and the idea(l) of the “masculine” body as untouchable. But according to Nikki Sullivan there is important differences between heterosexuality and butch-femme relations:

The important differences include the fact that butch-femme erotic system did not consistently follow the gender divisions of dominant culture. The femme unlike the heterosexual feminine woman was often described as highly sensual and/or sexual and who actively seeks out and experiences pleasure. What this seems to suggest is that the active/passive, subject/object dichotomies do not seem to neatly fit the butch-femme relations in the ways in which one might have supposed they would.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ See for example Sheila Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Heresy: A Feminist Perspective on the Lesbian Sexual Revolution* (North Melbourne: Spinifex, 1993)

For Butler, too, the butch-femme relations are not the copies of heterosexual gender relations but she used butch-femme desire to demonstrate how homosexual practices might *resignify* and denaturalize heterosexual gender binaries:

“butch” and “femme” as historical identities of sexual style, cannot be explained as chimerical representations of originally heterosexual identities. And neither can they be understood as the pernicious insistence of heterosexual constructs within gay sexuality and identity. The repetition of heterosexual constructs within sexual cultures both gay and straight may well be the inevitable site of the denaturalization and mobilization of gender categories. The replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. The *parodic repetition* of the original reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the idea of the natural and original.⁶⁸

By parodic repetition Butler aims at underlying an important point, as she does in the example of drag, too. Drag, by itself is not subversive, but rather it is subversive “to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality’s claim on naturalness and originality.”⁶⁹ But is it enough parodying to dominant norms to displace them? Can, parody itself, be the very medium for a reconsolidation of those norms? What distinguishes a parodic performance based upon disavowed identification from a parodic (subversive) performance emanating from a critical strategy of transgression? Butler gives the answer; what makes a

⁶⁷ Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 28.

⁶⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 31. (*italics added*)

⁶⁹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 125.

performance subversive is at the level of its resistance to calculation—the subject’s inability to control signification, unpredictable subversion. Her political agenda suggests that:

The critical task is, rather, to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them.⁷⁰

She suggests that subversive and parodic redeployment of power should be the focus of gay and lesbian practice. Using lesbian butch-femme identity as a starting point what I tried to investigate is the arguments revolved around those “*heterosexualized*” gender identities in homosexual contexts. What this study suggests is that the desire/identification generating in such contexts is neither the same nor different, but both. This issue will be further discussed in the context of “Bear masculinity,” which may also be seen as a copy/replica of heterosexual gender relations or as a possible site for opening new possibilities within and between gender relations. Is “Bear masculinity” a parody, a subversive repetition of heterosexual norms as a critical strategy? Does it subvert identities by contesting the rigid codes of hierarchical binarism through a *resignification* or is it simply a mimetic-failed copy? Does it produce “dis-empowering and denaturalizing effects”⁷¹ by adopting a specifically gay deployment of heterosexual constructs? These questions will be raised when discussing on “Bear masculinity ” but in

⁷⁰ Ibid., 147.

⁷¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 124.

order not to isolate it from other femininities and masculinities, and to have a better understanding of the phenomenon, I will now turn to another gay subculture—in which gender plays an important role in (sexual) identity formation—which existed in America between 70's and early 80's, and which has been said to display a highly masculine style: the gay clone, a style that has been used many times to show how in the 70's there has been a “butch-shift”⁷², a masculinization of gay people. But before looking at the gay clone, I will briefly mention a gay caricaturist, Tom of Finland, who, I believe, also had profound influence on (masculinization of) gay culture because of the fact that, he was a pioneer man in opening up the possibility of masculine identifications for gay men throughout his career.

The Man Who Made Gays Macho: Tom of Finland

Tom of Finland (Touko Laaksonen, aka ‘Tom’) is an artist known for his stylized homoerotic art and his influence on gay culture. Part of the importance of Tom's work is that it so overtly depicts sexual desire between traditionally masculine men. Indeed, Tom's illustrations present a hyper-masculine, working-class side of homosexual manhood that anticipated the emergence of the "clone" look in the 1970s. Micha Ramakers who wrote a book about Tom's images in relation to masculinity and homosexuality suggests that Tom's work was more influential than the gay political magazines of the time by its “valorization and eroticisation of masculinity.”⁷³

⁷² Segal (1990).

The gay characters in Tom's work have hypermasculine style, gave him the recognition as the originator of macho gay porn. His characters were from a diverse range of professions with their masculine implications, such as policeman, cowboy, sailor, soldier, lumberjack; who were having sex, which had a huge impact on the "masculinization of gay identity" in a camp style. As Ramakers put it "Tom of Finland's lifework was the masculinization of gay desire."⁷⁴ Most of his work featured the pumped-up male body, uniform characters with uniform bodies and faces making a new gay stereotype (the macho gay man) and, hence, "individuality was cancelled out in favor of one ideal image."⁷⁵ The images enabled gay men not only fantasize about them but also to identify with them. Tom's work opened up new possibilities for gay men, to embody (hyper) masculinity, a new fluid gendering for gay men, which affected the masculine identities of the 70's among gay men. One important example is the Clone style, which was dominant in the 70s with a newly hypermasculine style and which influenced the rise of Bear culture in certain ways as Bearness was considered as a *resignification* of the hypermasculine style of the Clone's.

⁷³ Micha Ramakers. *Dirty Pictures: Tom of Finland, Masculinity, and Homosexuality*. (New York: St Martin's Press. 2000). p. 112.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Masculinization of Gay People in the 70's: The Gay Clone

Gay masculinity and virility rapidly became extremely observable in gay men's aesthetics, fashions, hobbies, and erotica in the 1970s. This trend has been variously called "the butch shift," "the gay machismo," "masculinization"⁷⁶ and Edmund White's well written essay explains this shift in a richly illustrated way:

In the past, feminization, at least to a small and symbolic degree, seemed a necessary initiation into gay life, we all thought we had to be a bit nelly (effeminate) in order to be truly gay. Today almost the opposite seems to be true. In any crowd it is the homosexual men who are wearing beards, army-fatigues checked lumberjack shirts, work boots and

⁷⁶ Kittiwut Jod Taywaditep, "Marginalization Among the Marginalized: Gay Men's Anti-Effeminacy Attitudes," *Journal of Homosexuality* 42:1 (2001): 1-28. p. 9.

T-shirts and whose bodies are conspicuously built up [...] This masculinization of gay life is now nearly universal. Flamboyance has been traded in for a sober, restraint manner. Voices are lowered, jewelry is shed, cologne is banished and, in the decor of houses, velvet and chandeliers have been exchanged for functional carpets and industrial lights. The campy queen who screams in falsetto, dishes (playfully insults) her friends, swishes by in drag is an anachronism; in her place is an updated Paul Bunyan.

Personal advertisements for lovers or sex partners in gay publications call for men who are “macho,” “butch,” “masculine” or who have a “straight appearance.” The advertisements insists that “no fems need apply.” So extreme is this masculinization that it has been termed “macho Fascism” by its critics.

As Messner also states, by the 1970s “the gay culture seemed to be developing a love affair with hypermasculine displays of emotional and physical hardness and simultaneously devaluing anything considered feminine.”⁷⁷ The most well known example of this hyper gay masculinity is the Clone look of 70s. The clone—because of its uniform look and life style—is a particular articulation of gay masculinity that emerged in the major urban centers of gay life in the period between Stonewall riots of 1969, which signaled the birth of the gay liberation movement, and the beginning of AIDS epidemic, in the early 1980s and which “throughout the seventies and early eighties, set the tone in the homosexual community.”⁷⁸ The clone was:

[T]he manliest of men. He had a gym-defined body; after hours of rigorous bodybuilding, his physique rippled with bulging muscles, looking more like competitive body builders. He wore blue-collar garb—flannel shirts over muscle-T-shirts, Levi 501s over work

⁷⁷ Michael A. Messner, *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movement* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 82.

⁷⁸ Martine P. Levine. *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 8.

boots, bomber jackets over hooded sweatshirts. He kept his hair short and had a thick mustache or closely cropped beard.⁷⁹

Not only clones used stereotypically macho sign-vehicles as musculature, facial hair, short haircuts, and rugged, functional clothing to express butchness, they employed it on the verbal and sexual level, too. Sexual prowess was an important part of their lifestyle, with recreational drug use and casual sex which made its piteous end because of the deaths resulting from unprotected sex: AIDS. The same question, which was put above about Bear masculinity, can also be asked for the gay Clone. Is it denaturalizing or reproducing traditional gender norms? According to Adam I. Green “clone served in many respects to reiterate and consolidate the gender system, and were constituted by dominant meanings of masculinity acquired within heteronormative communities. The clone developed within and internalized the gendered semiotics of the heterosexual world by adopting masculine characteristics.”⁸⁰ But why such masculine characteristics have been desired, taken on and deliberately reinforced by gay men? Why is there this need to be seen as or feel like ‘real men’ and how is it probable to meet this need? Is it for passing as straight and having ‘more’ power as heterosexual men do? Is it a conscious strategy or an unconscious idealization of masculinity?

The *hypermasculine* style of the clone can be read as a way to challenge the stigmatization of gay men as failed men, as “sissies” and break away the assumption that gay men are effeminate. Since culture stigmatizes male gender role nonconformity by

⁷⁹ Ibid. 7.

⁸⁰ Adam Isaiah Green, “Gay but Not Queer: Toward a Post-Queer Study of Sexuality.” *Theory and Society* 31: 4 (Aug., 2002): 521-45, p. 535.

teasing, rejecting, mocking and even physically attacking⁸¹ (devaluation of effeminacy), adopting manly demeanor and attire may be as a means of expressing a more *valued* identity. Thus, it results in rejection of femininity among gay men:

The prejudice against effeminate homosexuals is operative not only among otherwise gay-positive straights, but also among gays themselves. Almost invariably, gay males request “straight appearing, straight acting” traits in a partner and portray themselves as having such.⁸²

One of the reasons for gay men adopting the same sexual and gender scripts like heterosexual men is because, all men, regardless of future sexual orientation, learn male gender role and sexual script, because “our culture lacks an anticipatory socialization process for adult homosexuality. Regarding same-sex love as a loathsome aberration, the agents of socialization prepare all youths for heterosexual masculinity.”⁸³ Thus according to Levine pre-heterosexual and pre-homosexual boys undergo the same ranges of gender socialization. Hegemonic constructions of masculinity are internalized in early stages of socialization that come to structure the erotic practices and ideation of straight and gay men. Consequently it is the “same erotic socialization as men who grew up to be straight.”⁸⁴ Thus gay men have been taught that:

⁸¹ “calling gay men ‘feminine’ or calling lesbians ‘masculine’ (...) it seems crucial to retain a theoretical apparatus that will account for how sexuality is regulated through the policing and shaming of gender.” Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter : On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 238.

⁸² Shari L. Thurer, *The End of Gender: A Psychological Autopsy* (New York : Routledge, 2005), p. 48.

⁸³ Martine P. Levine. *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 11.

[M]asculinity is valued and rewarded in the culture but femininity is devalued and subordinated. It shouldn't be too surprising that many gay men—having experienced the imposition of a socially devalued and despised “effeminate” gay male stereotype—increasingly came to define gay male liberation *not* in opposition to hegemonic masculinity but, rather, as a claim to be “just as masculine as the next guy.”⁸⁵

Refusal of effeminacy has been uttered by many gay men from early on in the history of modern homosexuality and has become more detectable with the immense embracing of hypermasculinity by the post-liberation gay culture since the early 1970s. What I observe is that contrary to the ‘camp style’ of 1950s and 1960s which was criticized by some gay groups as securing the sexual inversion theory (female soul trapped in male body), the hypermasculine style is the other end of that gender conformity/nonconformity distinction. On the one hand there is the exaggerated style of the (hyper) feminine ‘camp’ (which can be read as parodic and thus criticizing and showing the constructed nature of gender dimensions), on the other hand there is the exaggerated style of the (hyper) masculine ‘clone/macho’ but never of both. This reminds me of the explanation Benjamin gives about giving up one gender identity over the other to assume an identity. In a psychoanalytic account the boy needs to dis-identify with the mother in order to separate and assume his masculinity in the Oedipal stage. But in the preodipal phase:

⁸⁴ Adam Isaiah Green, “Gay but Not Queer: Toward a Post-Queer Study of Sexuality.” *Theory and Society* 31: 4 (Aug., 2002): 521-45. p. 535.

⁸⁵ Michael A. Messner, *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movement* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 83.

children are “overinclusive”: they believe they can have or be everything. They do not yet recognize the exclusivity of the anatomical difference; they want what the other sex has, not *instead* of but in *addition* to what they have.⁸⁶

Benjamin calls these multiple, bisexual identifications “overinclusive” and according to her view, what determines Oedipal outcomes is the extent to which these overinclusive bisexuality is given up. This Oedipal posture is built psychically on a foundation of defensive repudiation. Thus, without access to the overinclusive identifications, the Oedipal renunciation inevitably elides into repudiation, splitting the differences rather than truly recognizing it. Consequently the possibility of being both sexes is eliminated.⁸⁷ This is similar to the lack of cultural conventions for avowing homosexuality as a love object as I outlined in the previous section and Benjamin says that “patriarchal culture has historically given certain contents to gender categories.”⁸⁸ Hence it is whether camp *or* macho styles which have the *same distance* to ‘overinclusiveness’ but not an ‘or/and’ situation.

To sum up, as Lynne Segal puts it “however assertively or defensively seeking a space inside the dominant culture, homosexual subcultures have a tantalizing relationship with the masculine ideal—part challenge, part endorsement.”⁸⁹ These parts are important since

⁸⁶ Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 53.

⁸⁷ Benjamin criticizes Freud and his Oedipal identifications because she believes that “although these identifications are pervasive at the level of gender ideals, they do not seal off other development, other identifications, even though the theory represents them as doing so; they do not form a seamless, consistent, hegemonic structure that suppresses everything in the psyche”, which I found important to note. *Ibid.*, 77.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁸⁹ Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, (London: Virgo, 1990), p. 144.

the newly *hegemonic* solid and tough gay masculinity is helping to marginalize and subordinate effeminate gay men *within* gay communities.⁹⁰ Marginalization of effeminate gay men within macho style will be discussed further in Bear context. But what other accounts are there for explaining this butch shift that became visible in the 1970s? Is it only because pre-homosexual / heterosexual men undergo the same socialization which value masculinity whereas devalue femininity?

David Forrest states three reasons for this butch shift. Firstly, he believes that “there has been occurred an erosion and blurring of the sexual division of labour, whereby women moved increasingly into the more ‘serious’ male world of waged work, with demands for equality of opportunity.”⁹¹ Second, the increasing use and accessibility of contraception has tended to detach heterosexuality further from reproduction, thus ‘freeing’ female and male sexualities. And thirdly, he states that another reason for that butch shift is because of the objectification of male body as a product. After asking a similar question I have put—“Yet through our ‘masculinization’ are we not also reinforcing the very gender categories which are frequently the source of our oppression?”⁹²—he concludes, again with a similar answer to the problem:

⁹⁰ Michael A. Messner, *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movement* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications. 1997)

⁹¹ David Forrest. “We’re Here, We’re Queer, and We’re not Going Shopping: Changing Gay Male Identities in Contemporary Britain.” in *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*. Ed. Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne. (London; New York : Routledge. 1994), p. 102.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 105.

[G]ay masculinity must be seen simultaneously as both subversive (in that it challenges orthodox masculinity) and reactionary (in that it reinforces gender stereotypes - crucial factor in the oppression of gay sexuality).⁹³

To understand gay masculinities, I examined the notion of masculinity with regard to (hegemonic) heterosexual and homosexual masculinities. But what happens to “female” masculinities? Is masculinity tied to male body and maleness? Do the hard, muscular and athletic bodies of Clone’s, tie ‘masculinity’ to a ‘male body’? How do we understand masculinities without men? Maybe by looking at female masculinities.

Female Masculinities

Judith Halberstam declares that a sustained examination of female masculinity makes important interventions within gender / cultural / queer studies. It allows within queer sexual discourse for the disruption or flows between sexuality and identity, gender and anatomy. She further states that masculinity does not only belong to male arena and hence, it “has not been produced only by men, and does not properly express male heterosexuality. ‘Masculinity’ has also been produced by masculine women, gender deviants, and often lesbians.”⁹⁴ She believed that dominant masculinities, which appear to be naturalized relation between maleness and power, have an absolute dependence on minority masculinities. According to her, it is important and also helpful to contextualize a discussion of female masculinity—, which is neither, simply the opposite of female

⁹³ Ibid., 105.

⁹⁴ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*. (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 241.

femininity, nor the female versions of male masculinity—in direct opposition to more generalized discussions of masculinity.

In this chapter my aim was to analyze masculinities for a better understanding of “Bear community” and the masculinity the community embody. Masculinities as changing, multiple and differing identities cannot be isolated from other masculinities and sexualities and, consequently, we cannot isolate gay masculinities from heterosexual and other masculinities. Keeping these premises in mind, the following chapter will be particularly about “Bear men and bear masculinity.”



Figure 3. Loren Cameron (Self Portrait)

3. BEAR CULTURE IN THE WEST

Bear Magazine, which published its first official issue in 1987 made the public appearance of Bears, and their debut in the gay male collective consciousness in that period by being the first to develop the name. Bear community aroused from private home parties, mailing lists, networks (Bear mailing lists), BBSs, bear hug parties to signify an identity with its own magazines, spaces (the first bear bar ‘The Lone Star Saloon’ was founded in San Francisco in 1989), style, hence, subculture. In that period Bears were putting small ‘teddy bears’ to their hip pockets to emphasize their admiration of and interest in cuddling big, husky people. This was a way of showing their affectionate side which also revealed their difference with the Clone style of macho men because “bear culture is shaped by competing masculinities within gay cultures [...] The typical Bear is a response to the hypermasculine Clone phenomenon of the 1970s.”⁹⁵ It was not only a reactionary connection against the Clone’s masculinity by itself but rather against their hypermasculinity, and the way they displayed their masculinity with their bodies which was the dominant gay male style for more than a decade. This issue will be discussed with regard to the media portrayal of gay masculinity in following sections but now before going into detail my aim is to give some definitions about Bearness.

⁹⁵ Peter Hennen, “Bear Bodies, Bear Masculinity: Recuperation, Resistance, or Retreat?” *Gender & Society* 19: 1 (2005): 25-42. p. 32.

Who and What is a Bear?

Since the phrase Bear has come to imply so many different things to different people it is hard to give a clear-cut definition of the term Bear. First of all, “Bear” is a gay male identity label, which exclusively refers to a ‘decidedly’ masculine man who has a big, husky body and quite often natural facial (mostly bearded) and body hair (hairy chest). The animal ‘bear’ has been used in differing ways; such as while it is a wild animal, it also conveys softness and cuteness with teddy bear. Thus the symbol ‘Bear’ is not an arbitrary picked up one but rather it is thought to reflect on the both sides of the bears:



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

wild bear represents their ‘authentic,’ ‘natural’ masculinity, whereas teddy bear represents their affectionate, caring side (The myth of ‘Bear’ is an important one to mention and at the end of this chapter, ‘Bearness’ will be discussed with its connotative

meanings). Therefore it is said that the Bear ideal unites ‘traditional gender polarities—strong and sensitive, gruff and affectionate, independent-minded and nurturing [...]’.⁹⁶ In this respect, Bears differentiate themselves from the “exaggerated look” of the Clone and its rejection of all ‘feminine’ behavioral forms.

When it comes to define what is a Bear, much controversial definitions emerge.

Responses to this question yield a variety of answers. Some say that it is an attitude, for some it is the physical appearance that is the decisive character of a Bear, for others it is both and still for others ‘the absolute refusal to submit the categorization is the essence of being a bear.’⁹⁷

One argument I pointed out above is that Bears separate themselves from the Clone look of 1970s and they find Clone ethic exaggerated and exclusionary, whereas they find themselves and their masculinity ‘authentic’ and inclusionary. Specifically, Larry Toothman detaches Bearness from the Clone by calling Bear places where people “do not have to lose weight or shave their beards to fit in.”⁹⁸ After all is it a place where they *have to* gain weight or *not* shave their beard? Do Bears differ from the Clone only in respect to body politics? How identity is signaled by and in the course of the human body and how body becomes a medium for self-presentation and masculinity? Has fat become substitute for muscle? There are many other questions to ask, since Bear Culture has been

⁹⁶ Les K Wright (ed), *The Bear Book: Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*, (New York: Harrington Park Press), p. 38.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Larry Toothman, in Les K Wright (ed), *The Bear Book II: Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*, (New York: Harrington Park Press), *Ibid.*, 226.

supposed to be a reactionary movement against the dominating Clone ethic of the 70s which was highly influential in the gay scene with its hypermasculine style, hence, a response to gay media's portrayal of gayness, an eroticisation of the fat after the AIDS epidemic, still it is seen as a fetishization of hair or big bellies, a narcissistic deployment of desire for the sameness, as an internalized homophobia or a failed copy of heterosexual middle-class masculinity. Because there are so many different arguments about Bearness, I will discuss each view separately to understand what really is Bear phenomenon about.

Bear as Response to Gay Media

In the previous chapter the Clone look has been investigated and it has been revealed that their pumped up, muscled bodies were a way of signifying their masculinity in a highly hegemonic way. Thus, to be a masculine (gay) man meant to have a strong, hard, smooth and toned body. Furthermore, since it is clear that media is an important medium in the formation of personal identity through its powerful enculturation effects; beginning from the 70s, gay media's image of male beauty was clean-cut, smooth-skinned, slim, and muscular which was not different from the hegemonic heterosexual image, and which did not attract Bears. Accordingly, it has been argued that Bear people did not match the hegemonic criteria for the gay male beauty and theirs was a reaction to the body fascism, the "dreadful obsession of our culture with the slim, hard, usually hairless, young body as the image of (male/female) beauty [...]",⁹⁹ which takes many other forms.

⁹⁹ Les K Wright (ed), *The Bear Book II: Further Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*. (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2001), p. 54.

As a highly influential Bear writer, whose work has been cited in numerous articles and books, Les Wright who claims that the ubiquitous sexual imagery of the gay media and advertising has had remarkable power in influencing many men's sexuality, underlines the stereotypical image the gay media portrayed and how it was an important point to start with:

The one thing we had in common was having overcome the self-limiting belief that we had to conform to media images of gay male beauty, images that either we did not fit, and never would, or which were of no sexual interest to us.¹⁰⁰

An important aspect in that instance is that Bear people's reaction is not against media's portrayal of *masculine* gay men but against *how* this masculinity is *particularly presented*. Thus, Bears reject the exaggerated, hypermasculinity of the Clone (muscle, hard, smooth, toned) and of the gay leatherman in favor of a more—so-called—“authentic” masculinity, which includes baseball cap, T-shirts, flannel shirts, beards, body hair, and big bellies. It wouldn't be inappropriate then to say that “Bears are interested not so much in revising conventional masculinity but in resignifying it”¹⁰¹ and after the disappearance of the gay Clone, the Bear body stand in opposition with the hairless, gym-toned, muscle body of the ideal gay masculinity: ‘the twink’¹⁰² which is known in Bear culture. How Bear masculinity operates within broader gender relations and its relationship with hegemonic heterosexual and gay masculinities will be discussed in the next sessions with a specific focus on masculinity. For now, we can say that, the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 213.

¹⁰¹ Peter Hennen, “Bear Bodies, Bear Masculinity: Recuperation, Resistance, or Retreat?” *Gender & Society* 19: 1 (2005), p. 32.

¹⁰² Ibid., 33.

Bear phenomenon is read as a resistance to the gay media's portrayal of the gay masculinity. But what happens when we consider Mr. Bear contests, which I found problematic? After claiming a position based on a rejection of an ideal gay image, which makes them feel marginalized, do they create their own ideal Bear images through the same way? Is Bear media, which rose as a voice for men who do not fit the mass media's idealized vision of masculine beauty, now in the same trap? Although Les Wright claims, "the range of ideal bear types continues to expand beyond the awareness of any particular individual or group" other studies reveal that Bears create their own ideals which they are once opposed to.

In short we can conclude this section with the idea that the masculinization period of 1970's effect on gay male ideal produced with it minorized groups, who felt excluded and in turn, created their own organizations. So there were already people who liked big, hairy, bearded guys who did not feel the urge to come together to form a community later came to identify themselves as Bears. Moreover, it is said that Bear culture has its origins in informal "chubby" networks among gay men in the 70's and it was the Girth and Mirth group which was one of the earliest groups (1976) that Bear groups did originate from and which gained importance with the emergence of AIDS epidemic. Thus, aside from gay media's display of idealized male beauty the appearance of AIDS crisis mostly among gay men in that period accelerated the emergence of a Bear community.



Figure 7. Mr. Bear Germany 2006.

Bear as Response to AIDS

The AIDS epidemic which had devastating effects in most people's lives, was accepted as a medical term in 1982, which was, shortly after, stigmatized as a gay disease. Much argument around that time was about homosexuality and gay lifestyle. According to Jeffrey Weeks two theories was at stake in that period: "One stressed that it was the gay lifestyle that was the cause of infection; the other that it was a viral infection, probably transmitted through close contact and blood, which turned out to be the real situation."¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Jeffrey, Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths, & Modern Sexualities* (London; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1995), p. 47.

I believe that it would be a big mistake to talk about historical conditions and configurations of gay masculinities or sexualities without gaining some access to the impacts of AIDS' on gay communities and subcultures. Therefore we cannot disregard the impact of AIDS on the emergence of the Bear community. As Wright states:

The rise of a bear community is inseparable from the AIDS epidemic. This includes the first broadly accepted sexualization of abundant body weight; in the early days thin equaled sick or dying from AIDS, while fat equaled healthy, uninfected. [...] AIDS has called upon gay men to develop their nurturing side, to make conscious decisions about striving for intimacy, commitment, and life plans.¹⁰⁴

Thus, the impact of AIDS on Bear community was not only about sexualization of big bodies but also for forming a group identity since lots of people has been lost to AIDS. Other than its devastating effects, AIDS reinforced a sense of community-based environment, which fostered social and inclusive activities instead of anonymous sex. The teddy bear side of Bear identity, which supported intimacy, was lacking in the Clone subculture and that was a direct result of AIDS. Because of the communality of casual sex which was encouraged by the Clone style for more than a decade, the disease was more common among gay men and from early on the disease has been associated with homosexuality and the stereotypical person with the virus was portrayed as a thin, sick gay man. Thus, when the cultivation of the body was an important aspect of the gay Clone, AIDS ruined and destroyed the body that once adored and the "slim-phobia [...] coupled with a rejection of what many considered the gay male physical ideal—that of

¹⁰⁴ Les K Wright (ed), *The Bear Book: Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*, (New York: Harrington Park Press), p. 15.

the body—sculpted, slim-waisted, smooth-chested, perfectly coiffed young male [...].”¹⁰⁵

On the other hand Bears were big-bellied, hairy-chested, bearded, older guys.

So far, I underlined the connection of AIDS with the emergence of Bear community.

AIDS pandemic can be interpreted as opening up a space where the excluded, marginalized people came to celebrate their own bodies, and for others the big Bear body came to signify healthy and uninfected gay male identity. Is this enough for explaining the three B’s—big belly, beard, body hair—that Bears gave a high influence on? Isn’t it also a fetishization of the body parts?

Bear as Fetishism

In psychoanalytic literature fetishism for boys is about woman’s so-called castrated genitals, which invokes traumatic feelings in the male child because of a possible castration of his own. For Freud the fetish is not just a substitute for any old phallus but rather the one that was tremendously essential early in the childhood but which has been lost; that is the mother’s phallus, which gives her power and authority.¹⁰⁶ Thus, in Freud’s account only males can be fetishists. And simply speaking, the male turns a part of another’s body or a thing (not himself) into a phallus by giving a sexual overvaluation to that part or the inanimate object.

Freud’s theory of fetishism is the denial of mother’s castration and also recognition of it.

¹⁰⁵ Ron Suresha, “Bear Roots,” in Les K Wright (ed), *The Bear Book: Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*, (New York: Harrington Park Press), p. 47.

¹⁰⁶Sigmund Freud, “Fetishism” in Standard Edition 21.

The fetish acts as a veil covering over the male child's perception that his mother lacks a phallus; because the realization by the experience that he is not the same as mother gives the child a "narcissistic pain." Consequently, the fantasy of a "phallic mother" is a defensive transitional fantasy for the boy to struggle with that pain. The fetish allows the child to maintain that the castration hasn't happened at all. An important thing in Freud's account is that the fetish "remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it. It also saves the fetishist from becoming a homosexual, by endowing women with the characteristic which makes them tolerable as sexual objects."¹⁰⁷ In this sense a fetishist is a non-homosexual who doesn't want, unable or unwilling to give up, abandon the mother as love object and by the help of fetish he overcomes the castration anxiety produced along with it. He is not a homosexual since in Freud's account the homosexual boy accepts the symbolic castration and takes on the "feminine" position. The law tells the boy whether to "give up the mother or lose the penis." As Benjamin criticizes Freud's Oedipal identifications, it happens "One and the Other", but there is "no place for Both and Many."¹⁰⁸ He must disavow maternal castration if he is to protect himself against the possibility of his own castration. But what happens if the (homosexual) child does not disavow maternal castration and hence, his possible castration? For the fetishist, the fetish remains a substitute for the phallus of the mother that she lost, but for the homosexual boy we can read the fetish, for both his mother's phallus and for his own since his homosexuality also means a symbolic castration. An important point for me is that the homosexual boy may or may not take up

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 154.

¹⁰⁸ Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference*, (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 79.

the feminine position, unlike Freud observed. Freud's account suggests that a homosexual boy *accepts* the symbolic castration in order to take the feminine position. As a result, for him a fetishist is not a homosexual, since he both affirms and denies women's castration. Thus with that account it is possible to acknowledge homosexual fetishism. Moreover whereas desire and identification are mutually exclusive in a heterosexual, patriarchal culture which was discussed in the previous chapter; the masculine homosexual makes it possible to show that it is not impossible to desire and identify with the same sex of the parent while preserving a fetish object or body part for her mother's and/or his possible castration.

After giving some psychoanalytic account about fetishism, how can we understand Bears and Bear admirers as fetishists? John Yoakam suggests that Bears are fetishists due the fact that "they are sexually attracted to other man because of their hairiness and body type,"¹⁰⁹ and Les Wright also accepts "an overriding fetish for the male body hair and full beard."¹¹⁰ These writers accept body and facial hair as fetishes but what I found also an interesting aspect of Bear fetishization which has not been investigated in Bear culture is that, Bears also have a fetishistic tendency to "big bellies." While we can say that the beard and body hair are fetishistic substitutes for women's or/and their own castration, bellies, I suppose means a different thing. Facial hair and body hair reflect an anatomical difference between male and female sexes. Since the fetishist both affirms and denies women's castration the fetish cannot simply be equivalent to the maternal or female penis. Thus we may say that beards and body hair may be fetishes as the boy fetishize

¹⁰⁹ John R. Yoakam, "Parlaying Playmates into Lasting Friendships" in *The Bear Book II: Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*, (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1997), p. 143.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 212.

those, which are produced along with the anatomical differences between males and females other than the penis. Hence, body hair and facial hair, as fetishes, are interpreted as phallic substitutes for the lost phallus. Thus not to shave their beard and not to shave their body hair may be that they are regarded as phallic substitutes. Belly fetishism is important since Bears “consciously” gains weight. As they criticize Clones for their smooth, muscled chests, their so called “natural,” “authentic” masculinity, in fact, requires the business of gaining weight which is much less about gender than about eroticisation of certain body parts. We should also consider that the earliest bear groups originated as an outcome of Girth and Mirth groups. It might be an unconscious assumption—after the AIDS epidemic—that “the heavier equals healthier.” Might not it also be an unconscious desire for the prenatal “happy limbo of non-identity” which serves a fantasy repairing his narcissistic injury caused by his realization that “he will never attain mother’s femaleness and procreative capacity”¹¹¹ when he acknowledges his difference from the mother? Is it an ineffectually repressed narcissistic mortification that may have lifelong consequences? If as Ruth Lax suggests “men’s dreams and fantasies reveal that such repression is never totally successful, and that the wishes persist forever in men’s unconscious,”¹¹² can we interpret the big belly fetishization as the reflection of an unconscious desire to attain mother’s procreativity and a preservation of primary narcissism? Or in a broader sense, can we understand Bear body as a site where the lost phallus of the mother in the early childhood re-emerges through the phallic substitutes (body hair, beard) and his narcissistic injury is vanished by his fantasy of the prenatal phase with the fetishization of big bellies? If so Bearness is bound to body, and

¹¹¹ Ruth F. Lax, “Boys Envy of Mother and the Consequences of This Narcissistic Mortification,” in *Masculine Scenarios*, (London: Karnac, 2003), p. 125.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 133.

fetishisation of some body parts. Furthermore if we assume that mother's phallus is already a fetish invented by the child as a result of infantile narcissism it is now useful to have a closer focus on the subject of narcissism.

Bear as Narcissism

The concept of narcissism is one of the most important contributions of psychoanalysis and perhaps the most confusing. In "On Narcissism" Freud first described it as "auto-eroticism,"¹¹³ and hence, as perversion in which the individual takes himself as a sexual object. In the same essay he also used it to explain a form of homosexual object choice:

We have discovered, especially clearly in people whose libidinal development has suffered some disturbance, such as perverts and homosexuals, that in their later choice of love-objects they have taken as a model not their mother but their own selves. They are plainly seeking themselves as a love-object, and are exhibiting a type of object-choice which must be termed 'narcissistic.'¹¹⁴

His libidinal-economic point of view suggested narcissism as libidinal investment / cathexis of the self (ego, self-representation). On the other hand narcissism also meant a stage of development in which boundaries between the self and object have not yet been clearly defined. In other accounts it denoted self-esteem. As Pulver said "the use of the term narcissism to describe so many different aspects of self-interests and so many different levels of abstraction has led to considerable confusion in the psychoanalytic

¹¹³ Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction (1914)." *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*. Translated by J. Strachey, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 68.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

literature.”¹¹⁵ For those reasons, my usage of narcissism will be around the “narcissistic perfection”¹¹⁶ of the early childhood, “those experiences of early ‘perfect’ union with mother”¹¹⁷ and what I mean by narcissistic injury is the disturbances “that arise during the early phases of infantile development in relation to beginning separation from the mother and the clear differentiation of oneself as a separate individual.”¹¹⁸ Thus, narcissism reflects the prenatal stage in which “the child experiences a state of wholeness owing to his unity with his mother, the fusion of the *contained* with the *container*,”¹¹⁹ which means that, narcissism is originated in the prenatal life which is one of the basic assumptions of psychoanalysis as a grand theory that we all want to go back to our mother’s womb. In that sense Bears’ transformation of their bodies through the process of gaining weight (phallicizing their bodies with fat) can be understood with the narcissistic unconscious desire for the mother’s womb, where the fetus is both the “contained and the container”, both male and female, with a perfect unity with the mother, a stage of “wholeness” which is equated with the possession of the phallus. Moreover we can understand their desire for other Bears who look like them as narcissistic since narcissism doesn’t only refer to love of oneself but to the love of one’s *mirror* image as in the myth

¹¹⁵ Sydney E. Pulver, “Narcissism: The Term and the Concept” in *Essential Papers on Narcissism* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), p. 110.

¹¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, “On Narcissism: An Introduction (1914)” in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*. Translated by J. Strachey, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 88.

¹¹⁷ Sydney E. Pulver, “Narcissism: The Term and the Concept” in *Essential Papers on Narcissism* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), p. 100.

¹¹⁸ Arnold M. Cooper. “Narcissism” in *Essential Papers on Narcissism* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), p. 132.

¹¹⁹ Bela Grunberger, *Narcissism: Psychoanalytic Essays* (Madison, Connecticut: International University Press, 1990), p. 216.

of Narcissus.¹²⁰ But when this account becomes the only possible explanation for homosexual narcissism it becomes unfavorable. The common thesis for homosexual narcissism has been that narcissistic difficulties in gay men result in desire for likeness. What I argue is that although this may be a possible explanation for same-sex desire as I apply in the Bear context, defining sameness and difference in terms of “genital anatomy” fails to acknowledge the complexity of object choice. Thus, subjective experiences of difference are not less vital to same-sex desire than heterosexual desire. Consequently I don’t agree with Juan David Nasio when he says that “homosexuals are, above all, fundamentally narcissistic [...] they have an intense attachment to their own body, to their own image and to male sexual organ—both their own and that of their partners.”¹²¹ I found this logic unfavorable because desire for sameness does not inherently define narcissistic love, nor does the desire for difference distinguish object love that is narcissistic. A narcissistic love is not determined only in relation to *whom* one loves but *how* one loves is also important. If we assume same-sex love narcissistic through the gender of the object choice that remains an insufficient and damaged explanation. For instance what if we say that a man finds his mirror image on another woman which is a narcissistic love based on sameness?

To sum up for me narcissism is not much about “sameness” but “wholeness” which means having the phallus. Desire for sameness is not inherently narcissistic but that

¹²⁰ Robert D. Stolorow, “Toward a Functional Definition of Narcissism” in *Essential Papers on Narcissism* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), pp. 200-201.

¹²¹ Juan-David Nasio, “The Loneliness of the Homosexual” in *Masculine Scenarios*. Alcira M. Alizade, (ed). (London: Karnac, 2003), p. 84.

“sameness,” which is not essentially homosexual, can be read as an unconscious desire for the prenatal or preoedipal phase where the child has not yet acknowledge his difference from the mother. Moreover in the prenatal or preoedipal stage the child cannot differentiate himself from the mother, and there are “not two people who are the same,” but “one whole.” Thus, narcissistic desire is not about sameness per se but wholeness. Consequently when all Bears look alike, with all having beards, body hair and big bodies, it may be a desire for “wholeness” through their “sameness” which may be the narcissistic investment of their bodies. But that sameness is not the underlying factor for homosexual narcissism. It is not only about sameness but also how that sameness is reflected / demonstrated / represented. In the Bear context, when two hairy, bearded, ‘masculine’ men having sex, how is this sameness constructed? Isn’t the ‘authentic masculinity’ they claim to have rest their identity on is heterosexist? If their sameness comes from their heterosexist-masculine identification, can we insist on homosexual narcissism only in relation to sameness? And might not defining that sameness only in relation to ‘gender of the object choice’ be a damaging explanation as Sedgwick suggested? It might be a better strategy to focus on how that sameness occur which is in close relationship with heterosexuality in its rejection of femininity and celebration of masculinity.

Bears as “Phallic” Narcissists

Another aspect is that Bears’ hypermasculine look may be interpreted as a defense for the threat of castration which the “phallic narcissistic” people develop. According to

Meissner “the unconscious shame from the fear of castration is continually denied by phallic assertiveness” which is “compensated by the arrogant, assertive, often *hyper-masculine* and self-glorifying façade.”¹²² Their phallicizing of their body with body hair and beard—which reflect the anatomical difference of men from women—is the reflection of their hyper-masculinity. Also a Lacanian analysis might suggest that the hypermasculinity of the homosexual man is an endeavor “to have” the phallus which requires a dynamic and heterosexual desire. Moreover, phallic narcissists as Ben Bursten suggests “tends more to show himself off to exhibit his body, clothes, and manliness” and “they parade their masculinity”¹²³ This is what most Bears do, when they all suggest that they are contend with their masculinity, their body hairs, facial hairs. Another aspect of phallic narcissists is that they “constantly seek admiration and attention” and they are “more concerned with appearances than with the substance.”¹²⁴ So when the Bear Magazine says in its tag line “masculinity without trappings” or “men celebrating their masculinity”; this masculinity is exhibitionist with body hair and beards, more about appearance than substance. Thus they show their hyper-masculinity through narcissistic phallicizing of their bodies, which renders masculinity to male body and “that masculinity” is defined against the feminine. In that context Bears put their identity as oppose to femininity in general and effeminate gay men in particular. Hence their opposition to ‘effeminacy’ also produces their sameness. As discussed in the previous chapter there was a butch shift, a masculinization process in the 70s, which excluded

¹²² W. W. Meissner, “Narcissistic Personalities and Borderline Conditions: A Differential Diagnosis” in *Essential Papers on Narcissism* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), p. 408.

¹²³ Ben Bursten, “Some Narcissistic Personality Types” in *Essential Papers on Narcissism* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), p. 385.

¹²⁴ Arnold M. Cooper, “Narcissism” in *Essential Papers on Narcissism* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), p. 127.

effeminate gay men. In that respect Bear masculinity stands in complete rejection of effeminacy and Bear identity is constructed not through recognition but renunciation of femininity.

Bear as Effeminophobia or Internalized Homophobia?

Anti-effeminacy behavior among gay men is an important point to explore how gender dynamics play *within* gay masculinities. As the previous chapter pointed out, the meaning of masculinity cannot be acknowledged through fixed, stable understanding of it but it should be considered as multiple and changing which takes different forms within different historical organizational, institutional, personal situations. It changes over time and over space. Its form of hegemony may have opposing elements in different contexts. For instance in homosexuality, the theory of ‘inversion’ has been a highly influential one, which stressed that homosexual men have woman soul trapped in a male body. This theory was in accordance with the common sense logic that stabilizes bodies representing particular sexualities, which supported the heterosexual logic that desire and identification were mutually exclusive. In Sedgwick’s words this is the “preservation of an essential heterosexuality within desire itself, through a particular reading of the homosexuality of persons.”¹²⁵ The effeminate gay man and the butch lesbian have been used many times to illustrate the idea that gay men were feminine and lesbians were masculine.

¹²⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 87.

According to Taywaditop, anti-effeminacy among gay men is widespread. He claims that gender-nonconforming gay men not only experience intolerance from society but from other gay men as well. He found this situation ironic since “the most visible attacks against effeminacy are expressed by those who are most likely to understand what it to be stigmatized: other gay men.”¹²⁶ In addition to this argument he states two hypotheses as predictors of gay men’s anti-effeminacy attitudes, which are: hegemonic masculinity ideology and masculinity consciousness. He claims that the anti-effeminacy discrimination is in connection with other expressions of hegemonic masculinity ideology in society, which incorporate “sexism, antifemininity, subordination of women and homophobia.”¹²⁷ By masculinity consciousness he means “a man’s self concept,” and a “personal tendency to be concerned and preoccupied with masculinity in their public appearance.”¹²⁸ This masculinity consciousness can be applied to Bear context since masculinity plays a crucial role in their self-definition, and apparently in their appearance.

Scott Hill who defines himself a Bear, suggests that Bear people as a community “woven together by an appreciation of masculinity and genuineness in a man. This is what really makes a Bear. The most apparent of bear trait is masculinity, a trait for which we are obviously known.”¹²⁹ Although Bearness is defined in terms of a celebration of

¹²⁶ Kittiwut Jod Taywaditop, “Marginalization Among the Marginalized: Gay Men’s Anti-Effeminacy Attitudes,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 42:1 (2001), p. 1.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹²⁹ Scott Hill. Aroused from Hibernation.” *The Bear Book: Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*. Wright, Les K., (ed.) (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1997) p. 65.

masculinity through a masculinity consciousness, this masculinity is gained at the expense of being non-effeminate. For Peter Hennen this rejection of effeminacy “signals a broader devaluation of the feminine,” and hence he criticizes Bear masculinity as it “recuperates gendered hierarchies central to the logic of hegemonic masculinity.”¹³⁰

According to Taywaditop many gay men who experience discrimination in their childhood—which is painful and shameful—“defeminize” in order to avoid this experiences:

the defeminization process, which requires constant self-awareness of one’s masculine inadequacies, is likely to lead to a general discomfort associated with effeminacy. When this self-focused tendency becomes an enduring cognitive propensity (i.e., masculinity consciousness), negative affect is constantly paired with effeminacy, further strengthening the chronic discomfort over one’s effeminate characteristics. Through externalization or displacement, this discomfort maybe extended to effeminate gay men or effeminacy in general.¹³¹

What he proposes is that the defeminized gay men reflect their “self-directed” dissatisfaction with effeminacy to “other-directed” prejudice against effeminate gay men. ‘Effeminofobia,’ a term used by Sedgwick¹³² to describe the hatred of effeminate behaviors in males, has not only been embraced by heterosexuals but by gay men, too. Thus, gay men establish masculinity-based identifications through *devaluation* of effeminacy. This is because “a ‘pure’ masculinity cannot be displayed except in relation

¹³⁰ Peter Hennen, . “Bear Bodies, Bear Masculinity: Recuperation, Resistance, or Retreat?” *Gender & Society* 19: 1 (2005), p. 27.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³² Sedgwick, 1990.

to what is defined as its opposite: first and foremost, in relation to ‘femininity.’”¹³³ What is at stake in the Bear context is that not woman but it is the “twink” that makes available the actual oppositional anchor for most Bears. Hence for Hennen “In their virulent rejection of the effeminate stereotype and female drag, Bears certainly wish to convey that they are “not woman” but in practice, this is accomplished indirectly, through an attack on feminized, narcissistic body of the twink.”¹³⁴ As discussed in the former chapters an identity is gained at the expense of a non-identity, and exclusion; Bear identity is in great contrast with the effeminate gay men. But on the other hand when Bear people do not engage in “femininity” they problematize the mutually exclusive aspect of desire and identification. They are (masculine) gay men who desire other men. Does this aspect of Bears carries subversive potentials in a Butlerian logic? Does Bear identity put the issues of masculinity, femininity, desire, identification and sexuality into question? How are we to understand their rejection of effeminacy? What possibilities does Bear culture open up and close off in terms of gender resistance? How they engage in hegemonic heterosexual masculinity and how does “masculinity consciousness” shape Bear identity? Is this a queer parody or emulation? Should we take the issues of “reception” and “production” into account? Do Bear masculinity *denaturalize* or *renaturalize* gender relations through repetition of heterosexual constructs within homosexual constructs? Does it help us to reconsider masculinity and see the constructed nature of it? There are still more questions to put forward and the next session aims to answer these questions with taking a closer look at Bear masculinity.

¹³³ Lynne Segal, “Changing Men: Masculinities in Context.” *Theory and Society* 22: 5, Special Issue: Masculinities, 1993. p. 635.

¹³⁴ Peter Hennen, “Bear Bodies, Bear Masculinity: Recuperation, Resistance, or Retreat?” *Gender & Society* 19: 1 (2005), p. 34.

Passing as Straight: Just as the next guy, *only* they are gay

Masculinity is an important trait in a Bear's self-definition of himself. For most Bears their masculinity is something that they fit in and contend with it. The construction and consciousness of masculinity is a powerful dynamic in Bear men's lives and for them celebration of their masculinity seems healthy and natural. For these reasons, how their masculinity is constructed and how homosexual and heterosexual masculinities interact is important to explore. Furthermore, it shouldn't be forgotten that homosexual masculinity is an important locus of the dynamics of gender order and also subcultural diversity among gay men is important to recognize.

When Bear people celebrate their masculinity they claim to have an "authentic" masculinity, which accordingly brings masculine and feminine traits together in the Bear identity. This masculine side of Bear includes body hair, beards, and a masculinity that is bound to body. Their femininity, on the other hand, lies in their nurturing side. Sam Ganczaruk's definition of Bears suggests, "Other than the physical thing, i.e., beards, body hair, and huskiness [...] a 'bear' is a mature, stable man, at peace with himself. He has the courage and ability to show affection and receive it."¹³⁵ Thus, while the masculine side of a Bear lies in their visible, wild bear side, femininity in this sense recognized as showing their emotions. When Bear people defines masculinity and femininity they

¹³⁵ Sam Ganczaruk "The Bear Hug: An Interview with Sam Ganczaruk" in Wright, Les K., (ed.). *The Bear Book: Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*. New York: Harrington Park Press. 1997, p. 202.

essentialize the traditional gender polarities rather than contesting them. Consequently, when they unite strong and sensitive, gruff and affectionate, independent minded and nurturing aspects, the first term signifies masculinity while the second represents femininity. This is in accordance with their logic to dis-identify with effeminacy. Because effeminacy, again in this sense, regarded not as an emotional or psychological trait, but a trait that is associated with appearance. On the other hand when Bear people identify as masculine (although this masculinity is problematic) they challenge hegemonic masculinity by showing that being both “gay and masculine” is not impossible and they challenge the assumption that gay men are not necessarily effeminate, although their masculinity is more about the ‘appearance’ of their bodies. Peter Hennen states that:

[W]hen Bears refuse to “do submission” or “do effeminacy” with their bodies, they in fact exercise a kind of embodied agency, insofar as the Bear body is perceived by heterosexual men as both “not heterosexual” and “not effeminate.” Moreover, this is an agentic deployment of the Bear body that may act to radically destabilize the reified hegemonic narrative linking femininity with male homosexuality.¹³⁶

Bear people destabilize the hegemonic heterosexual logic that homosexuals are effeminate, which was—considered in the previous sections—served for stabilization of desire and identification. But as pointed out before, this destabilization is purchased at the price of marginalizing effeminate gay men. Moreover, when Bear people regarded as “not heterosexual,” this does not mean a rejection of heterosexual masculinity. On the contrary, what Bear identity tries to do is to eliminate the differences between Bear and heterosexual masculinity. Unlike Queer Theory, which makes a claim for radical

¹³⁶ Peter Hennen, “Bear Bodies, Bear Masculinity: Recuperation, Resistance, or Retreat?” *Gender & Society* 19: 1 (2005), p. 34.

difference and demand for broader public acceptance, Bears make a claim for radical *similarity*. And this similarity is to both heterosexual men and conventional masculinity. Thus Bear masculinity is in a very close relationship with hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. In this respect, Bears are “very straight.”¹³⁷ Though, there lies the opportunity of subversion as they are doing well in dissociating effeminacy from same-sex desire and building a culture that looks like a group of “regular guys.” The subversive implication, however, has very little to do with challenging gendered assumptions. What they want is to make their masculinity accepted. For Bears “they are just regular guys, only they are gay.”¹³⁸ Although it carries subversive implications, Bear masculinity simultaneously challenges and reproduces heterosexual masculine ideology since they both assign a lower status to bodies *perceived* as “feminine.” Furthermore, Bearness “underscores the centrality of the Bear body and its existence as an object of desire.”¹³⁹ As Lawrence D. Mass argues what happens if we “remove the buzz cuts and flat tops, goatees and stubble beards, tight shirts, bulk, and body hair, is there anything more elemental and uniting that can be identified?”¹⁴⁰ He thinks that Bearness is a kind of “masculine drag” for hiding “femininity” that is more about fashion than substance.

Taking all the assumptions into account is it possible to say that Bear movement is subversive? How does one get to understand whether heterosexual constructs in

¹³⁷ “A Very Straight Gay: Masculinity, Homosexual Experience, and The Dynamics of Gender.” *American Sociological Review* 57: 6 (Dec., 1992): 735-51.

¹³⁸ Silverstain and Picano (1992: 128-130) cited in Petter Hennen “Bear Bodies, Bear Masculinity: Recuperation, Resistance, or Retreat?” *Gender & Society* 19: 1 (2005), p. 26.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.35.

¹⁴⁰ Lawrence D. Mass, “Bears and Health” in *The Bear Book II: Further Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*. New York: Harrington Park Press. 2001. p. 36.

homosexual contexts have subversive potentials when Butler talks about “the disempowering and denaturalizing effects of a specifically gay deployment of heterosexual constructs”?¹⁴¹ Does mimicry or parody of heterosexuality by gay male subjects have the possibility to alter the stability of masculinity? Do Bears Queer masculinity? According to Richard Dyer they do so. He asks what happens ‘if that bearded, muscular beer drinker turns out to be a pansy, how ever are they going to know the ‘real’ man any more?’¹⁴² He supposes that taking up of such characteristics by gay people can be read as an attempt at destabilizing predominant cultural constructions of masculinity. Butler, also suggests a similar account but she further asserts that for subversion to be a successful strategy it should contest and display heterosexuality’s claims on naturalness and originality through *parodic contest*. Moreover practices of parody for Butler “can serve to reengage and reconsolidate the very distinction between privileged and naturalized gender configuration and that appears as derived, phantasmatic, and mimetic—a failed copy [...]”¹⁴³ For Bear masculinity, although it puts the heterosexist logic—which sees desire and identification as mutually exclusive—into question and reveals that homosexual men are not immanently effeminate, it renders masculinity to male body and invests in heteronormativity. They do not problematize or challenge gender of the object choice as the definitive of sexual identity. To the contrary they claim their masculinity to be “authentic” and “natural” and they accomplish it “through the appropriation of back-to-

¹⁴¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 124.

¹⁴² Richard Dyer, in *The Masculinities Reader*. Ed. Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett. (Cambridge, UK: Polity; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), p. 36.

¹⁴³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 146.

nature masculinity narratives that are sustained intersubjectively [...].”¹⁴⁴

To sum up Bear people *renaturalize* rather than *denaturalize* gender relations and they have very little to do with gendered assumptions. They link their new form of gay masculinity to being natural. They show no interest in calling heterosexual masculinity into question. They are only too content to assert it as their own. A Bear is a gay man, who is contented with his “self acceptance of his masculinity,”¹⁴⁵ who is “comfortable with” himself “just as they are.”¹⁴⁶ According to Scott Hill “a Bear is a person content with himself, leading a life he’s comfortable with by himself or, if he’s lucky, together with another humpy bruin. We’re just happy being ourselves.”¹⁴⁷ Considering all this arguments Bear masculinity both challenges and reproduces hegemonic masculinity. And if we consider Butlerian subversive elements in Bear context it seems to be more submissive than to be subversive. What this thesis claims is that, although Bear culture might be throwing out predetermined ideas about gayness, it conforms to traditional heterosexist logic and expectation about men and masculinity. The phrases “men celebrate their masculinity,” “masculinity without trappings,” “natural, authentic masculinity,” that is, the “pride” which comes from being masculine might be a conscious/unconscious strategy to mask the internalized rejection/hiding/concealing of their homosexuality, which might be a kind of “internalized homophobia” that “involves negative feelings about one’s own homosexuality” which “implicates an intrapsychic

¹⁴⁴ Peter Hennen, “Bear Bodies, Bear Masculinity: Recuperation, Resistance, or Retreat?” *Gender & Society* 19: 1 (2005), p. 41.

¹⁴⁵ *The Bear Book: Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*. Wright, Les K., (ed.) (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1997), p. 21.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

conflict between what people think they should be (i.e., heterosexual) and how they experience their own sexuality (i.e., as homosexual or bisexual).¹⁴⁸ At this point one should reflect on the side of “reception” and “production” to have a better understanding of whether Bears create Queer spaces in heterosexual matrix.

Do Bears create a Queer space in a heterosexual world? How effeminate gay men and straight men read the intentions of the gay men deploying heterosexual masculinity? According to Bell et al. what is important is “the intentions of the author of the identity, rather than the perceptions of the viewer.”¹⁴⁹ Still, to assume that Bear masculinity puts heterosexual masculinity’s claim for originality and naturalness into question is to look from the side a viewer who is “heterosexual.” When, for example, Richard Dyer states that it would queer people’s mind when “they” realize that the bearded man turns out be a “pansy” don’t he construct the viewers as heterosexuals (and white)? He gives perception more importance than intentionality. However Tyler asserts:

What makes one credible and other incredible when both are fictions? The answer, it seems, are the author’s intentions: parody is legible in the drama of gender performance if someone meant to script it, intending it to be there. Any potential in-difference or confusion of the two is eliminated by a focus in the theories on production rather than reception or perception.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Gregory M. Herek, “Beyond ‘Homophobia’: Thinking About Sexual Prejudice and Stigma in the Twenty-First Century” *Journal of National Sexuality Resource Center* 1: 2 (April 2004), p. 19.

¹⁴⁹ Bell et. al. cited in Lisa Walker, “More Than Just Skin--Deep: Fem(me)ininity and the Subversion of Identity.” *Gender, Place & Culture*, 2: 1 (March 1995).

<<http://raven.ubalt.edu/staff/simon/womeninfilm/Sexuality/lesbian.html>>

One cannot see such intentionality in Bear context since they are too happy with their masculinity and what they want is to make their masculinity accepted as normative. Thus, even if Bear masculinity is investigated from both sides of production and reception, it becomes problematical since it does not function as undermining straight masculinity's claim on naturalness but it *invests* in it. In that context Bear identity becomes 'passable for straight' rather than 'readable as queer'¹⁵¹ which also supposed to be true for 'lipstick lesbians.' They have been both accused of being collaborators with patriarchy, continuing the expectations about what it means to be a man and woman. However Nikki Sullivan asserted in the second chapter that "the femme unlike the heterosexual feminine woman was often described as highly sensual and/or sexual and who actively seeks out and experiences pleasure." Thus they differ from the norm as Geraldine Harris suggests that "if any version of gender mimicry or masquerade is to be effective as a resistant or subversive strategy, at some point or on some level it must be clearly legible as differing from the norm."¹⁵² In the Bear context, however, it is very hard to see such a 'clearly legible' difference from the norm. To the contrary they strengthen the norms through fetishistic preservation of conservative notions of masculinity at the expense of positioning effeminacy as undesirable. What is more important, they never problematize gender in terms of its independency from being a determining factor for sexuality which

¹⁵⁰ Carole-Anne Tyler, "Boys will be Girls: The Politics of Gay Drag" in D. Fuss (ed) *Inside/Out* (London Routledge, 1991), p. 54.

¹⁵¹ Lisa Walker, . "More Than Just Skin--Deep: Fem(me)ininity and the Subversion of Identity." *Gender, Place & Culture*, 2: 1 (March 1995)
<<http://raven.ubalt.edu/staff/simon/womeninfilm/Sexuality/lesbian.html>>

¹⁵² Geraldine Harris, *Staging Femininities: Performance and Performativity* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999) p. 62.

is the main problem for oppression of gay men in general.

Reconsidering Bear Masculinity by Adding Other Cultural Determinants into the Account

After discussing gender with a great detail it should not be forgotten that construction of gender cannot be kept distinct from other determinants such as class, race, ethnicity. As Butler puts it “gender is the vehicle for the phantasmatic transformation of that nexus of race and class [...]”¹⁵³ Thus cultural categories such as gender, class, race, sexuality, and so on do not exist independently of one another. So how can we define the absence of “ethnic” participation in Bear culture? What is the relationship of Bear masculinity with working-class masculinity? Is Bear phenomenon about “middle-class men’s fetishization of workingmen’s bodies and the complex power dynamic which operate between men across class lines”?¹⁵⁴ Is it also a fetish embedded with class, race, and gender? Is it a melancholic preservation of working-class masculinity? Is Bear ideology racist?

According to Eric Rofes Bear people:

[W]ho share not only the contemporary middle class’s deep anxiety about maintaining economic security and class status, but additional fears based on discrimination on the basis of sexual identity and HIV status, may be drawn Bear spaces and texts as sites for a reaffirmation of class privilege (and race privilege) through the apparent discovery of

¹⁵³ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 130.

¹⁵⁴ Eric Rofes, “Academics as Bears: Thoughts on Middle-Class Eroticization of Workingmen’s Bodies” in *The Bear Book: Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1997) p. 95.

‘comfort’ and erotic fulfillment in the celebration of *white* working-class masculinities.¹⁵⁵

It is not only whether Bears fetishize working-class masculinity but also what underlying dynamic plays in such a fetishization is important to focus on. Reaffirmation of class privilege may be an account for explaining the phenomenon. It may be also about “affirming” their masculinity since “working-class men have often been understood as more authentically masculinity than their middle-class counterparts.”¹⁵⁶

For the absence of ethnic participation in Bear culture saying that African American men do not identify with white-middle class concept of social identity is not enough. Although men of color “do not negotiate the acceptance of gay identity in exactly the same way white American do”¹⁵⁷ the racist comparisons between animals and people of color are common, whereas the “bear” in the Euro-American culture carries with it legendary beliefs such as “healer,” “creator,” “warrior,” “renewer.”¹⁵⁸ Thus, the iconic figure of the Bear was extremely successful in linking bigger body with nature, the wilderness, and more conventional, traditional notions of masculinity.

So far this chapter investigated Bearness at the level of textual analysis. The next chapter

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 97 (emphasis added)

¹⁵⁶ Peter Hennen, *Bear Bodies, Bear Masculinity: Recuperation, Resistance, or Retreat?* *Gender & Society* 19: 1 (2005), p. 30.

¹⁵⁷ Almaguer, 1991, cited in Peter Hennen. *Bear Bodies, Bear Masculinity: Recuperation, Resistance, or Retreat?* *Gender & Society* 19: 1 (2005), pp. 25-42.

¹⁵⁸ Michael S. Ramsey, “The Bear Clan: North American Totemic Mythology, Belief, and Legend” in *The Bear Book: Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*. Wright, Les K., (ed.) (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1997), pp. 51-64.

will focus on Bear movement in Turkish context, which has first appeared 10 years ago. The only two Bear groups, “Anadolu Ayıları” (Anatolian Bears, 2000-) and “Türkiye Ayıları” (Bears of Turkey, 2001-2006) and their magazines Pençe (Paw) and Beargi, respectively, will be analyzed. The following questions are important ones to understand the power, gender dynamics/relations within Bear community in Turkey:

- How Bears in Turkey define Bearness and masculinity? What is the role of gender in defining Bear identity? How do they use their bodies? How does the sex/gender/sexuality triad interrogate in Bear context?
- Do Bear masculinity creates subversive potentials by contesting subversive repetition? Does it differ from patriarchal masculinity, which oppresses women and other masculinities? Is it a new way of re-signifying masculinity? What meanings are attached to ‘masculinity consciousness’ of Bear masculinity?
- What is hegemonic within Bear community and how homosexual and heterosexual masculinities come closer or differ from each other in this context?
- Can we read Bear culture either a form of fetishism, narcissisms, homophobia, passing as straight?
- Is there a Bear beauty myth constituted through Bear media? If so what is at stake and isn’t it a contradiction to their existence? How do Bears are portrayed in these magazines?
- If an identity is always purchased at the expense of a non-identity, do effeminate gay men form that anti-identity for Bear people? Do Bears create a gender polarization among gay community?

4. BEAR VOICES FROM TURKEY

Origins of Bear Movement in Turkey: Bear Groups, Bear Magazines.

The appearance of Bear movement in Turkey starts from 1997 with a Bear mail group with its first meeting held in 1998, which then took the form of “Türkiye Ayıları” in 2000 (at their 11th meeting), and after then the group gets together bimonthly. In 2001 however some people left the group due to disagreements and formed “Anadolu Ayıları” in the same year. The disagreement lies at the heart of political activism since the latter group criticizes the apolitical nature of all Bear movements around the world and claims to be the first political Bear movement in the world by focusing on issues such as anti-militarism, heterosexism, homophobia, the meaning of Bear movement and the essences of Bearness, Iraq war, fetishism etc... Its magazine *Pençe* claims to be a magazine about “homo-masculine culture” which has 6 issues in 3 years and it aims to be about “liberating Bear movement from the cyberspace of internet and making it public to real life and showing Bear movement to people who has no idea about it and a sharing space for who knows the movement.”¹⁵⁹ On the contrary *Beargi* has no claim to be a political magazine, rather it aims to be an online ‘light’ magazine, which wants to be read easily, funny and showing issues in a Bear perspective. Beside from that political difference an important aspect is that these two groups have quite different definitions of “Bearness.”

¹⁵⁹ Since the magazines are written Turkish, it will be my translation from the magazines.

Bears Define Themselves: Analyzing Bear Magazines

Pençe gives a high importance to explain the Bear phenomenon, which is one of the main objectives of the magazine. Thus almost every issue raises questions about Bearness, whether Bear people are fetishists or homophobic and what possibilities Bear movement carry and what really is to be a Bear. Hence every issue discusses the definition of a Bear. For instance the back covers of issues 1, 2 and 5 have a Bear definition. According to Anadolu Ayıları, Bears are “people who know that homosexuality in Turkey does not have a single form and address, and it is possible and a very nice position to be homosexual without giving up their masculine attitude, position, and way of speaking and without compromising their facial and body hair, hence with preserving and most of the time highlighting them.” It is apparent that Bears place a high value on “masculinity consciousness”; they are preoccupied with their public appearance as masculine men and this masculinity lies at the heart of body. Their bodies function as sites that signify their masculinity. Thus they “highlight” their body and facial hair that makes them seem and be masculine. Still Pençe gives many different accounts of Bear people. In another account Bear is defined as a “gay man who is contented being male, who dresses *like* a man and behaves *like* a man and who fancy men like him.”¹⁶⁰ In this account it is clear that there is no originality of being a man but approximations of it. But this account suggests that there is an essence being a male and they simply reveal this essence and they are happy to live it. Thus Bears are gender conformists and their definition of Bear supports the heterosexist logic that gender should follow from sex. This is a masculine

¹⁶⁰ Pençe 1: 2 (italics added).

performativity in which they repeat the norms, the “citation” called masculinity at the site of their bodies. They may feel happy and contented in this masculinity but their highlighting this masculinity at the site of their bodies is problematic. In this context to be male is equal to be masculine. The terms are used reciprocally when they say they are content to be masculine or male.

According to Foucault being gay is not “identifying oneself with the physical masks and psychological features of the homosexual, but rather trying to work out and evolve a lifestyle.”¹⁶¹ For Bears however their physique and psychological traits, the masculinity consciousness are the central elements of their identity, which they use as:

[T]echnologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, conducts, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.¹⁶²

Gender and sex as technologies of self becomes the most internal element in deploying one’s sexuality and for Foucault it is the “agency of sex that we must break away from.”¹⁶³ But Bears further strengthen the agency of sex when they claim their bodies are natural reflection of their being male and when they see their masculinity as being the most characteristic aspect of their identity.

¹⁶¹ Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Lifestyle: An Interview with Michel Foucault” in *Gay Information* (Spring, 1981): 5.

¹⁶² Michel Foucault cited in Ladele McWhorter. *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 190.

¹⁶³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol: 1, An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, Vintage, 1980), p. 212.

It shouldn't be forgotten that although "subcultures fashion new meanings from objects and representations that circulate in mainstream cultures, these appropriations are often quickly recuperated through process of commodification and ideological reworking." Still Anadolu Ayıları sees Bears as a part of a movement which interrogates and produces effectively a new and different masculinity which has "libertarian, transforming and new dynamics,"¹⁶⁴ though this masculinity is nothing new which takes the appearance of realness at the sites of bodies.

Furthermore the latter account above ends with "who fancy men like him" is also important since Bear position is defined by the similarity of the love objects they choose. Although Pençe magazine claims that "the Bear definition tells not about a gay man's sexual object but about himself and his orientation"¹⁶⁵ and that "Bears have heterogeneous tastes of partner choice"¹⁶⁶ there are contradictions in their Bear definition since when the previous issue argues about Bearness being not a kind of fetishism, it says that "most Bears' search for a partner who looks like themselves shows a Bear's love of his fellow."¹⁶⁷ In this context Bear people have a desire for sameness that make them narcissistic. Hence, this desire for sameness comes from the masculine appearance they attribute to their bodies. Jessica Benjamin defines narcissism not as self-love or a lack of erotic connection to the other "but a love of someone *like* oneself, a homoerotic love."¹⁶⁸ Thus, their search for men like themselves in terms of their use of their bodies (beard,

¹⁶⁴ Pençe 6: 40.

¹⁶⁵ Pençe 3: 10.

¹⁶⁶ Pençe 3: 11.

¹⁶⁷ Pençe 2: 33.

¹⁶⁸ Jessica Benjamin. "The Oedipal Riddle" in *Identity: A Reader*. Ed. Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Pete Redman, (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications in association with The Open University, 2002), p. 236.

belly and body hair) can be interpreted as narcissistic. As phallic narcissistic they seek parading their masculinity, which is a kind of exhibitionism. In both magazines Bear people are shown semi-naked, hairy, almost all bearded and mostly fat. Furthermore “phallic narcissistic” people develop the hypermasculine look for the unconscious fear of castration and their search for other phallic narcissistic reveal that they are concerned more with the appearance. Thus the magazines make it clear that Bear people look for other Bears as partners or friends and the common idea Bears declare that they may have effeminate or non-Bear partners too, seems untrue. For instance when the writer in Beargi writes about a Thai saying “the most beautiful women of Thailand are men” he comments that it is for people who are interested in that kind of people after all it is a Bear magazine. Thus, being in relationship with so-called effeminate gay men is not a Bear thing to do. Furthermore what is more important is the idealization of Bear people in Beargi magazine, which is more visual than textual by content. In that magazine all the models shown at the cover are “typical Bears.” Typical in Beargi sense because in their 14th issue they call Bear people for modeling with a prerequisite. It says “it would be good if you have a physique which calls upon Bear beauty understanding.”¹⁶⁹ Isn’t it a contradiction to their own existence as Bears since they say overtly that Bear movement is a response and reaction to the gay media’s portrayal of smooth skinned, muscled gay ideal of twink or effeminate gay men which made people like Bears feel marginalized and isolated? Do they expect people to confirm the self-limiting gay Bear beauty? Although Les Wright claims that the range of Bears differ and although Bears have a classification system according to many dimensions such as body hair, fat, beard, age,

¹⁶⁹ Beargi. 14: 47.

kinky stuff etc... the images shown in Beargi magazine has an ideal of Bear beauty with excessive body hair, beard and fat. ("Teddy bear" is used for a heavy Bear and "otter" for not-heavy one. Age differs in the Bear media while they show mostly men over 30 and young Bears are called "cubs," whereas older Bears are called "daddies") They also have a Bear beauty contest which helps Bear ideal become much stronger and they create the same exclusionary mechanisms they faced and opposed themselves as Bears. Thus they create their own beauty ideal, which is in great contrast to their objection of gay beauty ideal. The same Bear ideal manifests itself in Beargi, too. When the writer defines a foreigner Bear, the International Mr. Bear of 2003, they say that he is a cute guy who has an "ideal" Bear image.

When Bear people define themselves as masculine, as contented with their bodies and identities, when they creating their own Bear beauty ideal, they put a high importance on being "like themselves" and "harbi."¹⁷⁰ For example in the fifth issue of Beargi the writer is introduced with a Bear who is very "harbi." In the same issue the writer suggests that a gay marriage can be more "harbi" than a heterosexual marriage. In the ninth issue, after losing a friend they remember him as someone who was "harbi." In the thirteenth issue the writer wants a relation, which is real, sincere, and "harbi." This is an identity not based on becoming but being. The notion of being a "harbi" person is in close relationship with being *like* heterosexual. Especially Beargi magazine emphasizes the similarity between Bears and heterosexuals and it asserts, "the only concern of homosexuals is to be recognized legally and to have social security like other citizens

¹⁷⁰ It is hard to translate "harbi" to any other language since it has many meanings attached to it. Harbi refers to a person who tells the truth, who behaves appropriate, who is frank, courageous; clean without any tricks in mind. It can be used as a noun, adjective or adverb.

do.”¹⁷¹

Another aspect is, when they claim to be contented with their masculinity they assure people that they do not regard masculinity as something which gives them power or superiority, advantage or dominance over women or effeminate gay men. Pençe magazine specifically takes this issue and it declares that a Bear is someone who likes the existence of masculine traits but who doesn't take them as an advantage or virtuousness and neither their masculinity equip them with power or hegemony. Thus Bears state that they do not exclude femininity or effeminate gay man in general or neither they regard them as inferior or treat them contemptuously. However they define Bear identity as oppose to effeminacy. In its first issue Pençe defines Bearness as a state of being not effeminate. In their presentation of new places, discos, cafes or restaurants they give a high importance on whether effeminate or Bear people attend to that place. They create their own spaces where Bears outnumber effeminate gay men. The following examples from Pençe and Beargi reveals Bear people's exclusion of effeminacy:

- I am hairy and bearded. I would like to correspond gay people who are 30+ and not effeminate (Personal message in message board, Pençe 1).
- I am not a feminine gay and I don't like effeminacy, str8 acting (Another personal message, Pençe 1).

¹⁷¹ Beargi, 8.

- Womanish people come here too (Turkish bath) but later they wail and say “you mustached faggots” and they gather around their shampoo, after care set and skirt and go (Pençe, 2).
- I was expecting him dressed like a girl but he was serious and dignified (Pençe 2).
- I am a man like a man and I carry another man in my heart (Beargi, 4)
- I wouldn't think that I could be so close with a lesbian. It was as if there were two men [...] (Beargi, 8)
- If a man likes another man why would he make a concession of his masculinity? What it is to be like me, to behave like a woman? After all I don't understand people who sleeps with them, too. Since you go bed with someone coquettish like this, go instead be with a woman (These are the sentences of a lesbian whose speech is found very warm and right by the Bear writer who affirms her, Beargi, 8)
- It is a place for gays who look like typical public man with mustache [...]. It is a place effeminate gay men are not welcomed nicely (Beargi, 11)
- Posing quasi-humans (attributing it to effeminate gay man in gay bars, Beargi, 11)
- Even though Bear people show up occasionally, it is a not an admirable disco/bar for us (Beargi, 4)

Anti-Effeminacy Behavior Among Bears

All of these examples show that Bear people marginalize and exclude effeminate gay men. They do not take it into account that it might be quite possible for an effeminate gay

man to be contented with his body, to be male and enjoy it and to act as himself. But Bear people find effeminate gay men's identity as artificial and deviant. The common attitude they have for effeminate people strengthens the assumption that "the masculine homosexual may oppress the feminine in ways similar to hegemonic masculinity's subordination of homosexuals and men of color."¹⁷² Thus it may be claimed that maintenance of hypermasculine symbols among gay men may function to endorse negative attitudes toward femininity. Furthermore Bears' anti-effeminacy behavior again reveals their gender conformity. In the above example an effeminate gay man is an abject person who is not and cannot be a sexual object, cannot give someone a turn on because there are "men" and "women," rather "masculine men" and "feminine women" (and even masculine lesbians, butches). As Butler says "there will be two sexes, discrete and uniform, and they will be expressed in gender and sexuality, so that any social displays of nonidentity, discontinuity, or sexual incoherence will be punished, controlled, ostracized, reformed."¹⁷³ However when the abjected effeminate gay men becomes as a figure of erotic cathexis, it contests the heterosexual law and opens new possibilities within rigid gender binary system. Bears, to the contrary, by abjecting effeminate gay men, close these possibilities of multiple identifications.

What is more, the anti-effeminacy behavior among Bear people may be an internalized homophobia since homophobia is not the fear or hatred of gays but it is the fear of being

¹⁷² Jay Clarkson, "'Everyday Joe' versus 'Pissy, Bitchy, Queens': Gay Masculinity on Straight Acting.com." *The Journal of Men's Studies* 14: 2 (Winter, 2006), p. 195.
<<http://mensstudies.metapress.com/content/k211406225v07782/>>

¹⁷³ Judith Butler, "Sexual Inversions." *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*. Ed. Susan Hekman, (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 65.

seen as sissy (Kimmel, 2001). Bears also share some hesitation for being seen as “homosexuals” since most of them are closeted and out Bears are a few in number (in Turkish context). For example when they mention memories about the 24th meeting in 2002 they travel an hour by bus and the bus driver is a relative of a Bear in the group. However Bears say that they “succeed in” arriving the place without making any mistakes or outing their identity. In addition to this, when they put pictures of their meeting to their Internet site or to the magazines, they blur their faces and they use nicknames. Few of them are divorced and have children and most of them had girlfriend early on their life. Most of them reveal how they face with their “masculinity consciousness” throughout their lives. When telling his early stories about meeting other Bear people a Bear man says: “I was trying to hold my masculine features on my face,” and “on the one hand I was getting more and more nervous and maintaining a masculine attitude as far as I can and trying to use a bad language. On the other hand I realized that I was getting much into the “womanish” friendship atmosphere and I thought I should be more relaxed.”¹⁷⁴ Masculinity in this account “denotes appearance and also demeanor and behavior, and is elaborated in distinctive speech, gestures, postures, and garb [...]”¹⁷⁵ and it requires “defeminization” which leads rejection of effeminacy.

Apart from defeminization or internalized homophobia, excessive eating is another site where Bear people “do masculinity.” Eating possess a very important place in a Bear’s life and it is not surprising that all the magazines have a recipe page and presentation of cafes with a ‘good menu.’ They even talk about what they ate in their meeting (in fact it

¹⁷⁴ Pençe, 5.

¹⁷⁵ Alphonso Lingis. “A Man” in *Revealing Male Bodies*. Ed. Nancy Tuana, (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, c2002), p.146.

takes a big part of the summary of their meetings). Eating spontaneously and expansively is considered as a mark of masculinity. According to Jay Clarkson a large physique is a requisite for a macho perception. A very important aspect of their excessive eating is that they eat consciously to gain weight. For instance in Bear magazine the Bear guy who is going to take part in Bear week in Cologne says that he would stop shaving and start eating much. This is not perceived as a joke but some, not all, it is true that Bear people eat much to gain weight, to be admired by other Bears. For instance when a Bear writes about sleep apnea and the best way to prevent is losing weight, he finds the cure to the problem something “unfortunate.” Their not shaving their beards and keeping them intentionally as signs of their identity also show that Bearness cannot be that much “natural” it claims to be. Rather it shows how sexuality “operates primarily by investing bodies with the category of sex, that is, making bodies into the bearers of a principle of identity.”¹⁷⁶ Bodies in this sense produced according to the principles of heterosexuality’s coherence and integrity, as either male or female. The construction of Bear body serves for the stabilization of gender identity and gender identity becomes the primary essence of a person’s self-identity and the most internal element in Bear identity. Bear people do not realize that gender and sex are the production of heterosexual logic, which takes the appearance of norm, not through its restrictive law but through the naturalization process and sex and gender helps heterosexuality seem natural and the norm. The heterosexualization of desire in this sense “requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine,’ where these

¹⁷⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol: 1, An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, Vintage, 1980), p. 154.

are understood as expressive attributes of ‘male’ and ‘female.’”¹⁷⁷ Thus when Foucault calls for a different economy of “bodies and pleasures” he suggests liberating from sex and gender:

It is the agency of sex that we must break away from, if we aim—through a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality—to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibilities of resistance. The rallying point of the counter-attack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures.¹⁷⁸

“Bare” Bodies—Body, Sex, Gender, and Sexuality

In the Bear context Bear bodies represent their gender identity, and it is also used for defining their sexuality. They are masculine homosexuals, and their bodies are sites representing their masculinity. As Elizabeth Grosz suggests “masculinity and femininity are not simply social categories as it were externally or arbitrarily imposed on the subject’s sex. Masculine and feminine are necessarily related to the structure of the lived experience and meaning of bodies.”¹⁷⁹ David Forrest gives a similar account when he says “‘male masculinity is tied to a masculine body.’”¹⁸⁰ This in turn stabilizes Bear

¹⁷⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 17.

¹⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol: 1, An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, Vintage, 1980), p. 157.

¹⁷⁹ Elizabeth Grosz cited in Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 128.

identity. Bear identity is tied to their gender identity and this gender identity comes from their bodies and they use their bodies for explaining their sexualities. In this sense Bears are “positioning a gay identity” which “produces exclusions, represses difference, and normalizes being gay.”¹⁸¹ They value “being” over “becoming” that Foucault opposes. For him the issue is not finding out the truth about our sexuality within us but rather it is about how we use our sexuality. That means the problem is not a manner of “being” but as a manner of practice. Thus Foucault calls for a “gay asceticism,” “a style of existence” for every one, cultivating “a care of the self” taking self as a work of art. And in his account art is not about being but becoming. But Bears underline what they “are” rather than what they “do.”

Bears Hug, “Bear Hugs”

Before finishing this chapter it is important to note that Bears provide sexual innovations when there is a great deal of prominence on physical touch between Bears. The institutionalized practice of “Bear Hug”¹⁸² plays an important role in Bear organizations, Bear nights, and also, in their everyday life, which “disperse pleasure across the body and disrupt genitally centered, phallus-and-receptacle interpretations of sex.”¹⁸³ For instance

¹⁸⁰ David Forrest, “We’re Here, We’re Queer, and We’re not Going Shopping: Changing Gay Male Identities in Contemporary Britain.” *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*. Ed. Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 105.

¹⁸¹ Steven Seidman, “Identity and Politics in a ‘Postmodern’ Gay Culture” *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Ed. Michael Warner, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 135.

¹⁸² Bear Hug: The action of putting your arms around someone very tightly and quite roughly. (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary) <<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>>

the 5th issue *Beargi* sets the theme of the pictures of models as “hugging.” Still these practices coexist with rather than put out of place the phallic stress on insertive intercourse. Moreover Yi-Fu Tuan states, “among adults, touching and hugging as a manner of greeting are increasingly rare. In the US, even the handshake is going out of fashion.”¹⁸⁴ Thus when two Bear people hug each other they are different from heterosexual men who are homophobic about touching each other. This aspect of Bear hug is something taboo in heterosexual masculine ideology. Still there are cultural differences between men hugging each other in Turkey and in the West. In Turkey, men’s hugging each other is not a taboo but rather it is the common way of greeting each other.

In a psychoanalytic perspective, if we consider Bears as phallic narcissists, Bear hug can also be interpreted as their search for admiration. And finally the innovative practice of hugging among Bears will be more effective if more and more Bears come out of the closet. If we assume that personal is political the issue of Bear coming out stories is an important topic to understand complex dynamics playing in and “out” of gender, sexuality, body, desire, identifications, knowledge, power, age, class, race, ethnicity and more.

So far I outlined Bear masculinity and the subversive and submissive potentials it carries, its relationship with hegemonic, heterosexual, and other masculinities and femininities by investigating the phenomenon analytically and contextually. Still, masculinities are

¹⁸³ Peter Hennen, “Bear Bodies, Bear Masculinity: Recuperation, Resistance, or Retreat?” *Gender & Society* 19: 1 (2005), p. 40.

¹⁸⁴ Yi-Fu Tuan, “The Pleasures of Touch” in *The Book of Touch*. Ed. Constance Classen, (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2005), p. 75.

changing over time and space, between different institutional settings, within many determinants such as age, class, race, and ethnicity. Thus, including more elements into the phenomenon and discussing on them will enhance our understanding of Bear movement in a more productive direction. Furthermore not only masculinities but understanding of sexualities also differ culturally. Consequently homosexuality or the “homosexual” cannot be understood in a universal, fixed, single logic. For instance understanding Bearness in Western and Turkish contexts cannot be treated the same, since for instance there are gender relations within gender, such as being top (active, inserter) or bottom (passive, insertee) plays more importance in Eastern cultures. When Marshall asserts “men with a strong sense of their male gender identity and their masculine role could entirely enter same-sex sexual relations without challenging their heterosexual sense of self,”¹⁸⁵ this reasoning for instance allows many “heterosexual” men to engage in “homosexual” relations and still they may appear to be seen as “hyper-masculine,” or “hyper-heterosexual.” Thus it is the gender role that is at stake in some societies. In this account the “real” man is the penetrator whose gender role is the primary element of his identity.

Consequently, gender is not a single identity and the personal aspect of it should not be underestimated. As Nancy Chodorow suggests there are “many individual masculinities and femininities” and “each person personally inflects and creates her ‘own’ gender.”¹⁸⁶

The personal individuality of gender is very important to reflect upon as the term

¹⁸⁵John Marshall in Huseyin Tapinc, “Masculinity, Femininity, and Turkish Male Homosexuality” in *Modern Homosexualities : Fragments of Lesbian and Gay Experience*. Ed. Ken Plummer. London: Routledge. 1992, p. 41.

¹⁸⁶ Nancy Chodorow, “Gender as a Personal and Cultural Construction.” *Signs* 20: 3 (Spring, 1995), p. 521.

“masculinity consciousness” suggests or the importance of “coming out stories” I touched upon underlines. Because gender is:

an ongoing emotional creation and intrapsychic interpretation, of cultural meanings and of bodily, emotional, and self-other experience, all mediated by conscious and unconscious fantasy. We cannot capture this emotional, unconscious fantasy meaning either in terms of cultural gender meaning, as feminists have tended to do, or in terms of monolithic claims about genital structure or function of pre-oedipal and oedipal developmental patterns, which has been the characteristic psychoanalytic pattern.¹⁸⁷

To sum up, the aim of this final chapter was to look at “personal” side of gender through the personal narratives of Bears, making it apart from personal, but also multiple, emotional, indeterminate, contested, cultural, experimental, and subjective since gender is formed and reformed throughout the life circle and “gendered self” is a changing project with its own “self, identity, body imagery, sexual fantasy, images and fantasies about parents, cultural stories, and unconscious and conscious fantasies about intimacy, dependency, and nurturance.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 540-541.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 541.

CONCLUSION

The present study, which has particularly elaborated on Bear culture and Bear masculinity searched for subversive potentials the movement opens up and/or forecloses in terms of gender and sexual relations by comparing and contrasting heterosexual and homosexual masculinities and femininities and investigating the issue in terms of narcissism, fetishism, internalized homophobia and effeminophobia and exploring the phenomena focusing on Turkish Bear media context.

The replication of heterosexual constructs in homosexual frames has been argued as bringing the constructed nature of the so-called heterosexual original into question as in the example of drag Butler exemplifies (parodic repetition). Hence, the question of whether Bear masculinity opens new queer spaces in a subversive, parodic repetition by putting heterosexuality's claim on naturalness/originality or the dis-empowering and denaturalizing effects it carries by contesting the rigid codes of hierarchical binarism has been discussed. Consequently the study suggests that Bear masculinity is part challenge and part endorsement (Segal). Bear masculinity, which has been heavily influenced by hegemonic masculine ideology, simultaneously challenges and reproduces it. It carries subversive, resistant potentials when it dissociates effeminacy from homosexuality, or desire from identification. However this subversive potential of Bear masculinity is accomplished at the expense of assigning a lower status to bodies perceived as feminine

and it has very little to do with problematizing gendered assumptions. In its dissociation from effeminacy, it locates effeminacy as unwelcome, and in doing so valorizes those phallic identities that maintain conventional notions of masculinity. That means the subversive possibility of dissociating effeminacy from same-sex desire has nothing to do with challenging gendered assumptions. Although Bear people show that desire and identification are not inherently mutually exclusive, they support the idea that gender must follow from sex with two sexes discrete and uniform and they in turn marginalize effeminate gay men.

Repudiation of femininity is a central element in Bear masculinity. Instead of recognizing the other who is different (although they claim they do), Bear masculinity is established through repudiation rather than recognition of the other (Jessica Benjamin). This repudiation is apparent in Bear media as well. Bear people become men by approximating the “having the phallus” in the conventional masculine ideology. Thus the feminine is the inferior other and marginalization of effeminate gay men is very common in Bear media as well. In this sense, they support the idea that masculinity and femininity proceeds through the accomplishment of an always-compulsory heterosexuality. In this sense Bear people are very straight and they call for a radical similarity with heterosexual men and hegemonic masculinity and they stress that they are not very different, *only* they are gay. In the Turkish context Bear ideology mostly serves for “passing as straight,” since most of them are closeted, sometimes married.

Bear people assign a great important value on masculinity and masculinity consciousness (preoccupation with masculinity in their public appearance) and the signification of masculine gender identity naturalizes gender binary at the site of bodies which congeal over time to produce the effect of a substance (Butler). This hyper-masculinity consciousness devalues femininity in general and takes masculinity as something natural, given, normal. In that aspect Bear people also reveal that masculinity as well as femininity are the traces of gender melancholy as Butler suggests.

Bear media represents an ideal Bear beauty ideal through Mr. Bear contests or presentation of a homogenous Bear image, and this in turn marginalizes other gay men and Bears, who feel inadequate for not measuring up to the ideal which Bear people *were* arguing against. Thus other Bears have to confirm the Bear media images of gay male beauty.

Bear people preserve a fetishistic tendency towards body hair, beard and big body. In fact these three B's make the essence of being a Bear. They search for people who have beard, body hair and a big body. Although Bear people and Bear media claim that Bear definitions tell not about a Bear's sexual object choice but himself, most Bears search for other Bears as partners or friends which makes Bearness as a narcissistic, homoerotic love. They share a common desire for sameness. In this respect Bears are narcissists and Bearness come to define not only their self but their object choice as well. This situation is apparent in the Bear media the study has focused on.

Bear hug provides a sexual innovation among Bears. Physical touch, both affectionate and sexual, is placed a high value among Bears. However there is not a total rejection of phallus since the insertive intercourse coexists with Bear hug. Hence the dispersal of pleasure across the body may carry within disruptive elements for genitally centered readings of sex.

What is more, Bear people place a high value on defining themselves rather than what they do. Thus Bear identity is not about a way of existence or art of living in Foucauldian sense.

Finally as the last chapter illustrated, gender is not a fixed, single identity but it is an identity, which personally and culturally differs. Thus Bear movement in Turkey should be investigated adding more cultural and personal elements into the account because Bear masculinity is an important locus to understand how gay or heterosexual (hegemonic) masculinities are constructed and what kind of power relations they reveal. Consequently, studying more about gay sub-cultures gives us more understanding about gender relations and by making gender more personal, by investigating more personal stories (e.g. coming out stories, in-depth interviews) will make the big picture much more clear.

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