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Title: Object analysis of three Australian leather title sashes

Theme: **Small and detailed**

Oral presentation (20 minutes)

## Abstract

This paper discusses the sash presented to the winner of a leather title contest, such as Sydney Mr Leather. The sash is usually made of leather and passed on from one year's title holder to the next. The title holder wears the sash at events throughout the title year, representing their local leather club. Some sashes include names of previous title holders; other sashes incorporate symbols to represent them. Sometimes the leather pride flag is incorporated into the design of the sash. The paper draws from primary and secondary sources to build understanding of the perceived symbolism and significance of the sash within the leather subculture. It then takes an object analysis approach (Palmer 2013) to examining three leather sashes currently in use in Australia. The analysis reveals a rich array of local craft skills and practices. It also reveals gaps between title years, caused by community upheaval and the COVID-19 pandemic, pointing to the precarity of both a leather title and its associated sash. This paper responds to the call for the "recentering of subjectivity within queer historiography led by queer-identified scholars" by Wagner (2024): the author is from within the leather community. As these are niche objects within a subculture within a sexual minority, their existence is precarious. Leather sashes hold significance within the community within which they exist, yet they are unlikely to be preserved in museum collections or discussed in cultural histories. This paper thus aims to contribute to the documentation of and discourse on LGBTQIA+ material culture.

Keywords: leather culture, leather, LGBTQIA+ material culture, object analysis