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Lesbian cruising: an examination of the concept and methods.

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HIV, was reduced during the middle Tolerance and Acceptance stages, and was again high in the later Pride and Synthesis stages. Each of the psychosocial variables was significantly different according to stage of development ($p < .001$). Qualitative analysis of subjects' comments also revealed support for the U-shaped pattern.

KEYWORDS. Gay, homosexual, identity, development, formation, well-being, coming out, sexual orientation

The Relative Importance of Ethnicity and Religion in Predicting Attitudes Towards Gays and Lesbians

127

Lisa J. Schulte, PhD
Juan Battle, PhD

Using data from a sample of college students from several campuses throughout the United States, this research examines whether ethnic differences (African Americans versus European Americans) in attitudes toward gays and lesbians are a function of religious attendance. Multiple regressions were run separately for attitudes towards lesbians and attitudes toward gay men. When predicting attitudes toward lesbians, ethnic differences were present in the absence of religious attitudes; however, when religious attitudes were entered into the model, ethnic differences disappeared. In predicting attitudes toward gay men, ethnic differences were never present, while religious attitudes were always statistically significant. We conclude that differences in attitudes toward homosexuals in general, and gay men specifically, are not necessarily a function of ethnicity but possibly of religious attendance and the effect of the "Black church." We end with a discussion of the link between ethnicity, religion, HIV/AIDS, and heterosexism in the African American community.

KEYWORDS. Ethnicity, religion, attitudes, gays, lesbians, heterosexism, African American, European American, Black church

Characteristics of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual, Asians, Asian Americans, and Immigrants from Asia to the USA

143

Douglas C. Kimmel, PhD
Huso Yi, PhD (cand.)

An exploratory study of self-identified lesbian, gay, and bisexual Asians and Asian Americans surveyed respondents (60 women and 254 men) using a questionnaire in four languages from nineteen different sources in Korea, Japan, China, and the US. Respondents were compared in terms of country of residence, whether they immigrated to the US, having a same-sex lover, living with the lover, being open about their sexual orientation to the family, and age. Respondents in the US were generally more open about their sexual orientation. Openness to the family was related to other variables suggesting an affirmative lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity.

KEY WORDS. Chinese, cross-cultural, gender, HIV/AIDS, homosexuality, Japanese, Korean, sexual orientation, sexuality

Lesbian Cruising: An Examination of the Concept and Methods

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ABSTRACT. The concept of cruising has typically focused on gay male activity and, as such, has been narrowly focused and limited. This view has reinforced negative stereotypical images of gay men and has devalued women's more subtle styles and longer-term relationships. This paper argues that lesbians do cruise but also problematizes the definition of cruising in lesbian culture. Utilizing observations and in-depth interviews, I have broadened the definition of cruising to include a range of behavior as evidenced in both the lesbian and gay community. I have developed a typology of cruising, highlighting seven styles based on method, whether the individual approaches or not, intent, and investment. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2004 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Lesbian, gay, cruising, dating, sociology, bars, sexuality, scripts, ethnography, culture

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INTRODUCTION

The viability of a subculture is found in the ability of its members to maintain a space within which its differentiating definition of reality is affirmed. This paper is concerned with the creation, maintenance and possible transformation of "interaction rituals" (Goffman, 1967) within lesbian bars. In particular, I will address the issue of lesbian cruising. The concept of cruising has previously been examined and discussed as a predominantly male activity; therefore, it should be noted that the concept itself has been gendered and, as such, has been narrowly focused and limited. As typically presented, the concept reinforces stereotypical gay male behavior while ignoring and devaluing lesbian interactional patterns. Lesbian cruising and the issues surrounding the concept and practice provide an indicator of changing behavior and philosophy within the lesbian community (and to a certain degree the women's community) with regard to attitudes toward sexuality and sexual conduct. This paper argues that lesbians do cruise but also problematizes the definition of cruising in lesbian culture. Studies of lesbian cruising also provide insight and understanding into the political and social forces at work within the subculture.

The lesbian community, like other subcultural groups, is often viewed by the larger society as a homogeneous entity. Lesbians are perceived to have singularly common lives; however, the lesbian subculture is a diverse and dynamic group. Studies regarding lesbian lifestyle issues, therefore, must encompass this diversity and range of behavior while, at the same time, examine the common themes that exist within the group. This research attempts to broaden our scope and understanding of one aspect of the lesbian social world, lesbian bars, by ascertaining a sense of this special social space as it is experienced by its participants.

There are three primary aspects involved in the social environment of women's clubs that affect the concept of lesbian cruising: individual experiences brought into the setting, the social ecology of the setting itself, and the cruising methods used. This paper will briefly address the first two aspects (due to limitation of space) and will focus on the third aspect, cruising methods.

Sexual awareness and what is perceived as acceptable sexual behavior have changed in both the general society and the lesbian/gay community. While both sexual and gender norms have either changed or softened in recent years (Blumentfeld and Raymond, 1988), my experience and observations indicate that women in general remain more reluctant than males to make the initial approach to a prospective partner.

Both academic and popular writers have noted the difficulty lesbians have initiating interaction. The dilemma is so widely known and shared among the lesbian community that it has become comedic material (Lea Delaria, 1995, cited in Rose: 152).

In this society, the single heterosexual woman in a bar setting generally conforms to the larger societal rules and sexual scripts of interaction. If she wishes to meet a man she will make herself "presentable" and receptive to approach. While she may seem a passive participant, she is, in fact, actively engaged in the interaction. In a lesbian setting, little or nothing would happen if all of the women waited to be approached. Kitaka, who owned and operated a sex club called Ecstasy Lounge, found that women were hesitant to approach other women, particularly to initiate a sexual encounter (1999). Realizing that women were hesitant to initiate interaction, volunteers, who acted as hostesses, introduced women or engaged in sex when desired.

At the Ecstasy Lounge, they (the hostesses) did not have the social barriers that usually kept them from pursuing women at bars or other public places. They had a reason to approach women for sex, it was their 'job' as a hostess! (Kitaka: 181-82)

Kitaka also devised games to ease interactional tensions. A lesbian club designed for public sexual encounters is clearly a different interactional space than the typical lesbian bar. What Kitaka's experiences illustrate, however, is that interaction rituals that fall outside of normative scripts are problematic in a lesbian social environment. Lesbians, constituting a sororal group, have had to adapt, create, and maintain their own environment and rules of interaction.

Previous definitions of cruising have narrowly focused on the impersonal sexual pursuits of gay men. This limited perspective privileges stereotypical male, aggressive roles and reinforces negative stereotypical images of a promiscuous gay lifestyle. When I first observed men cruising in gay bars, I quickly noted their overt acts of cruising. One of the first interactions I noted was a man who approached a second man. The approaching man grabbed the other man's groin area, gave a quick head nod toward a back room and both men left the bar area for that back room. I later was told (I was not permitted to enter) the room was an area where sexual exchanges occurred. This type of behavior fits the stereotypical image of cruising. If I had stopped observing at that point or if I simply looked no closer I would have come to the conclusion that this style was all there was to cruising. I had not observed women acting

as aggressively or overtly and did not see special rooms² for sexual encounters in the women's clubs. I would have come to the conclusion, based upon these observations, that lesbians do not cruise. However, I did look closer over a period of many years at the interactional patterns occurring in both men's and women's bar settings and discovered a range of cruising styles which led to my expanding the concept of cruising.

I have broadened the definition of cruising to include a range of behavior as evidenced in both the lesbian and gay community. Cruising will be defined as the purposeful search for a socio-sexual partner, in some cases for a limited relationship (one-night stand) and in others for an indeterminate period. There are numerous styles and methods of cruising, and I have developed a typology of cruising, highlighting seven styles based on method, whether the individual approaches or not, intent, and investment. The primary and most accessible cruising ground for the lesbian community is the lesbian/gay bar or club.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research, using an ethnographic approach, focuses narrowly on the behavior of women as observed in lesbian clubs. Entry into the settings was not a problem for me as I was a known member of the community. I have frequented many lesbian clubs in the large southern, metropolitan city I examined and around the country for both social and observational purposes.

My personal exposure to lesbian and gay bars and to cruising began in 1979 in a large southern city. I entered the clubs as a naive, single woman looking for friendship, companionship, and a good time. I joined the student gay organization associated with the local university and met quite a few people who were more than willing to show me the town. Within the first few months I had visited all of the lesbian and gay clubs in the city (numbering approximately 20). I then began venturing out on my own, finding my niche within the community.

In my young adulthood I was outgoing and presented myself as very confident and self-assured. These personal characteristics, along with my desire to expand my sexual experiences and remain unattached, impacted the cruising method I chose to use in the bar settings. I frequented the clubs often and actively participated in cruising (a style which will later be identified as "Home Base"). This exposure and experience gave me a context in which to place my observations and re-

spondent accounts of cruising. The ability to contextualize and personalize my findings provided me an insider's view into the interactional dramas unfolding in the lesbian and gay bar settings.

I examined lesbian cruising between 1979 and 1992, conducting interviews and focused observations during three separate time periods: 1982, 1986, and 1992. These data provide a historical perspective of the lesbian community, bar participation, and of cruising activity and attitudes. The observations and interviews were conducted concurrently, using an open interview guide with a base set of questions. The focus of the interviews was on the respondent's past and present bar participation, how they meet potential partners and their perceptions, attitudes and actions relating to the factors affecting cruising. All interviews were recorded on cassette tape and then later transcribed. Field notes were recorded primarily during the three indicated time periods in the two or three most popular clubs of the time. So as to be less conspicuous, I generally took notes in the privacy of a bathroom stall or my car. Although I continued to patronize the lesbian clubs during the ten-year span, the frequency of structured observations was the highest during the three specified time periods. I generally visited one or two clubs during the weekend and one club on the weekdays, attempting to assess the flow and characteristics of clientele. In addition, I altered my focus over the course of an observation period to differing aspects of cruising interaction. At first, I thought there were only two distinct styles based on the desire for a short- or long-term relationship. As my research progressed I soon realized the complexity of various factors, including intent. The seven styles of cruising emerged over the course of the study as the complexity and distinct elements unfolded.

My respondent sample was composed of 46 women who identified themselves as lesbian. The women ranged in age from 18 to 47 and were predominately White (38 White, 6 Black, 2 Hispanic). In all three studies notices asking for participants were posted in clubs. The remaining participants were gathered by "snowball" sampling technique.³

CRUISING

Cruising can be considered more than the physical act of searching for a partner. The concept involves the attitudes and beliefs associated with the term cruising and the act of cruising itself; the intentions and beliefs, and attitudes toward those intentions; the investment toward the action; the feedback the action receives; and the methods themselves.

This is a complex interaction process which has been narrowly regarded by the sociological and psychological communities, and has focused almost entirely on impersonal, casual sexual pursuits. While many gay men and some women certainly have and do engage in this type of cruising behavior, the literature has been limited to an impersonal sexual focus.

Using the narrow conception of the term, the literature to date generally views cruising as a common practice among gay men (Altman, 1982; Bell and Weinberg, 1978; Karlen, 1971). This has not been the perception of lesbians. Bell and Weinberg found:

Less than 20 percent of the homosexual females, Black and White, had ever cruised during the past year, and the little cruising they did was almost entirely limited to bars and private parties. The few who did any cruising were more likely than their male counterparts to make the first approach to a prospective partner and were apt to spend a much greater length of time with her. Because such a small number of lesbians had done any cruising, no attempt was made to analyze these data further. (1978: 79)

Bell and Weinberg concluded that only twenty percent of women in their sample had ever cruised. My research suggests that what they found, in actuality, was that twenty percent of the women surveyed admitted to cruising. Their research relied on a common meaning of the term cruising and did not account for the possibility that unfavorable attitudes toward the concept might have limited the results. My research reveals that lesbians do not have a single, common definition for cruising and many find the term quite objectionable. Simply asking a question regarding cruising, therefore, will not provide an adequate portrayal of cruising behavior.

There is a common misconception that all gay men and only gay men engage in promiscuous sexual behavior. What is true is that while some gay men choose to have a variety of partners, many others don't. The word "promiscuous" is a value-laden term and seems to carry a negative connotation when applied to gay men. . . . To say someone is promiscuous, then, is usually to imply a critical judgment. Yet, to have a variety of partners does not necessarily preclude the possibility of having truly loving, intimate, and stable relationships. (Blumenfeld and Raymond, 1988: 376)

Impersonal sexual gratification has long been associated with the gay men's community and with cruising behavior. While women do have less personal, short-term sexual encounters (i.e., the "one-night stand") (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983; Bell and Weinberg, 1978), it is also true that women report having far fewer one-night stands than their male counterparts (Simenauer and Carroll, 1982; Bell and Weinberg, 1978). A major distinction between lesbian and gay men's communities is the perception and acceptance of this type of behavior. In this respect, the gay community reflects the mores of the straight community. A man who "plays the field," enjoying many sexual partners is "sowing his wild oats" and is exalted by his peers. Women often exhibit understanding and acceptance of this type of behavior in men. A woman in a similar situation is labeled by the larger heterosexual community as no less than a "whore" or "slut" and is the target of disgust, ridicule, and often ostracization by both men and women.

One explanation for these negative attitudes relates to what Gayle Rubin has referred to as the "sex hierarchy" (1984: 282) in which lines are drawn between acceptable, marginal, and off limits sexuality. According to Rubin, the line of "good" and "normal" sex is drawn at heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, noncommercial, coupled, relational, of the same generation, in private, no pornography, bodies only, and vanilla (1984: 280-81). Everything on the other side of the line constitutes "bad" or "abnormal" sexuality. Even in "bad" sexuality, however, there is a contested level of sexuality which includes promiscuous heterosexual sex and long-term homosexual, relational sex (Rubin: 282). These lines are constructed by a society through a system of laws; by social groups through less formal but equally powerful sanctions; and by individuals through their own internal system of social and psychological control (Rubin, 1984). Conservative restrictions on sexuality, which privilege male eroticism, exists within social, religious, and historical contexts. It is within this social context that the lines are drawn and negotiated. With the advent of the feminist and lesbian feminist movements, a new wave of moral edicts have been posited by the more conservative factions of those groups (Rubin, 1984). Lesbians and lesbian feminists have also constructed a sexual hierarchy, delimiting appropriate sexual behavior (which generally is long-term, committed, relational, monogamous, bodies only, no pornography) from inappropriate sexual behavior (which often involves promiscuity, penetration, more than two, bondage, sadomasochism). "Good" lesbian sex clearly reflects broader societal edicts and as such is dynamic in nature. Because these broader societal attitudes and perceptions of sexual-

ity carry over into the lesbian and gay community (Blumentfeld and Raymond, 1988), it follows that fear of being labeled a promiscuous woman would affect a lesbian's behavior and her reporting of her behavior.

In a study of drinking/driving in the tavern subculture, Joseph A. Kotarba (1984: 152-60) noted that for a bar patron, the greatest threat to his lifestyle in the bar was being labeled a drunk driver or an alcoholic. To decrease this possibility, patrons created deceptive strategies to avoid getting caught and labeled as such. In the same respect, women who feel that cruising is negatively connoted and fear being labeled a cruiser might create strategies for accomplishing cruising while decreasing the possibility of being labeled as such.

Strategies for Initiating an Intimate Relationship

Anyone seeking to initiate an intimate relationship consciously formulates a plan of action. The plan of action may simply entail being in the same locale as a specific prospective partner or may involve more elaborate details. The individual must take into account the setting, social situation, and socially constructed rules of behavior. What an individual does in this type of situation is a product of several different factors: personal biography; social framework; and intention.

Personal biography refers first to an individual's personality or personal characteristics (e.g., shy, outgoing, low self-esteem, high self-esteem, etc.). Secondly, an individual's experiences in similar situations (including personal experiences and observations or knowledge of other's experiences) consciously and unconsciously impact upon one's biography and subsequent actions.

Social framework consists of gender socialization or social conditioning, social ecology, social context, and investment.

Gender Socialization and Roles. Complicating what otherwise might be a straightforward male/female distinction in a relationship is the question of gender role identification within the lesbian community. Lesbians choose to accept and inherit or reject the scripting of self-concepts (presentation of self) and intimate relations from the dominant heterosexual society. In other words, lesbians can take stereotypical female or male gender traits and roles, along with the accompanying verbiage, self and social identification, and apply all of these to a lesbian identity, relationships, and/or setting. The alternative is to take some, or none of these scripts and create or transform self-concepts and interaction rituals into new roles and traits.

The presence of a butch/femme role dichotomy has been in existence in the lesbian community since the 1950s (Kennedy and Davis, 1993, Faderman, 1991). However, the prominence of these role definitions and personal styles have changed over time. It was a prescribed requirement among some groups in the past for a lesbian to identify herself as either butch or femme. The issue of role playing and the percentage of lesbians who internalize a role definition have decreased over time.

Today, it is easier for women to choose when or if to project or actively participate in a role. The lesbian-feminist movement directed women away from the butch/femme dichotomy because it represented mirroring a straight, male-dominated model. It became politically incorrect to identify oneself as butch or femme. Even more politically incorrect was defining oneself as femme or a "lipstick lesbian" because these women were seen by lesbian-feminists as buying into the heterosexual vision of how a woman was to behave and appear.

Women have been socialized to exhibit seductiveness and receptivity to approach by men. Some women are taught specific methods to attract a man while others simply learn by watching women in their social environment, on television and in movies. Generally, it has been assumed that women are passive participants in the process of meeting, dating, and mate selection (meet/date/mate), leaving men to be the aggressors and in the position of approaching women. In a straight or gay setting a woman who is receptive to approach is not, however, passive. There are varying degrees of actions, body posturing, and facial expressions, from subtle to overt, that indicate a woman's receptivity. In *A Descriptive Dictionary and Atlas of Sexology* (1991) this process is examined.

In human sexuality, proceptivity can be defined as any behavior pattern a woman employs to express interest in a man, to arouse him sexually, or to maintain her sociosexual interaction with him. Such patterns are culture-specific but often seem to involve extensive nonverbal communication: for example, body language, including looks, touches, shifts in posture toward the man, and various voice tones, is used to express warmth or interest. These patterns are part of Courtship and are often colloquially described as flirtation. . . . Strictly, proceptivity refers only to female behavior, although some sex researchers have employed it for behavior enacted by men. This later usage, however, has the problem of diminishing specifically female patterns in proceptivity, and of retreating to the views that only men express sexual interest overtly

and that women are sexually passive, coy, reluctant, or hesitant. (Francoeur: 512-13)

Since this is the traditional role in which most women have been socialized to emulate, it is comfortable to many lesbians. In a lesbian setting involving the meet/date/mate selection process, very little would happen if all of the women took a receptive position. Interactive actions in the cruising game are well defined for lesbians who conform to prescribe gendered roles. The rules of the game are less complicated for a role-defined woman, making cruising easier. For example, a butch-identified woman is expected to make the approach, lead in dancing, or make proposals. A femme identified woman makes herself receptive to approach and waits for the butch identified woman to initiate contact, etc.

Some situations lend themselves to role dichotomy as with country and western style dancing where one woman has to lead. When the dichotomy is identifiable it becomes easier to know who will lead and who will follow. The point should be made that role designation, in a larger sense, cannot be assigned to a woman simply based upon appearance, as Bobbi (1986, 23-year-old, White) indicates:

To a certain extent they do play roles at the bar, but it's not like male role and female roles. It's more like active and passive. You know, they don't dress like . . . the active . . . the aggressive ones don't dress butch anymore and the passive ones don't dress feminine anymore. They all dress alike.

It would be shortsighted to assign a role designation to a woman based solely on whether she approaches or not. Many women, butch identified or not, are not practiced in the art of approaching another woman and, therefore, are not as comfortable initiating interaction. Problems with role definition arise when a butch woman is too shy or afraid to make an approach or a femme woman is not content to sit around and wait. Necessity and courage provide the impetus for many women to approach another, particularly for the woman who is seeking an immediate sexual encounter.

Social Ecology: The physical space of the locale defines the degree to which interaction is facilitated. Erving Goffman referred to bars as "open regions" (Goffman, 1963: 132). Essentially, this means that any two people are free to initiate interaction. Individuals within the boundaries of such settings possess varying degrees of social accessibility or "mutual openness" (Goffman, 1963: 131), providing participants in the

setting a license to engage in interaction without commitment. Some social settings are specifically designed to encourage interaction. In settings such as bars, interaction becomes patterned and given meaning in a symbolic way which then becomes ritualized.

Social Context. Relationships can be initiated in a variety of settings (some of which are deemed more appropriate than others). A singles bar, coffee house, dance, etc., are places where people commonly engage in interaction with those they are unacquainted with in order to find prospective partners. Within the lesbian/gay community, bars serve as a primary locale for individuals looking for prospective partners.

Bars serve many functions for both the gay and straight communities in which they exist. The gay bar provides an avenue for normative integration into the gay community. For many emerging gay women and men, the bar provides support for their gay identity and lifestyle. In a society where homosexuals are restricted from acting out their identity in virtually all public settings, the gay bar provides them with a public place to socialize and meet potential partners in a relatively safe environment. Gay bars have been recognized as a main focal point of the gay community (Gagnon and Simon, 1967; Hooker, 1967; Achilles, 1967; Levine, 1979; Sage, 1979; Wolf, 1979; Kennedy and Davis, 1993). In recent years, the lesbian social world has expanded with a greater array of entertainment venues, such as lesbian concerts, movies, and other affinity groups. However, despite the growth of entertainment options, lesbian bars, in the city examined, remain very popular.

Finding a prospective sexual and/or life partner and, thus, revealing one's sexual identity in a heterosexually constructed society is more easily accomplished in a designated safe space. Wayne Sage (1979: 153) noted that providing a place for gays to meet one another was the gay bar's most important function. Nancy Achilles (1967: 231) maintains that the essential service the gay bar must render is to permit, yet control, the formation of sexual relationships. Evelyn Hooker conceives the homosexual bar as a sexual market "where agreements are made for the potential exchange of sexual services, of sex without obligation or commitment—the 'one night stand'" (1967: 175). The type of behavior that Hooker describes has been typically classified as "cruising."

Investment. Another important factor regarding a woman's participation and initiation of an intimate relationship relates to her personal investment and the amount of risk she is willing to take to achieve her goals. Women in our society tend to place a high value on relationships; therefore, the investment and initial interaction in any potential relationship becomes significant. Public disclosure of interest/attraction is a so-

cial commitment which exposes the individual to potential risks, such as damage to the ego or self-esteem. Rejection, in this context, carries greater significance. In other words, when there is a high level of investment in success an equally high investment level exists in rejection—thereby increasing the risk factor. Fear of rejection was cited most often as the reason some respondents would not approach another woman. Simenauer and Carroll, in their study of single, heterosexual men and women, found that “most women would like to be more aggressive in their dating methods but are held back by a sense of guilt” and that women frequently reported feeling intimidated and repressed (1982: 94).

Through socialization, men are more practiced at initiating interaction and socially prepared for potential rejection. A woman who has been socialized to be receptive rather than to initiate, in a lesbian setting, lacks this preparation. For the woman with low self-esteem, fear of rejection may prevent her from approaching a potential partner.

In an attempt to overcome fear of rejection, not uncommonly, some women look to their peers for encouragement and support before approaching another woman. In *Lonely in America*, Suzanne Gordon examined methods and “mechanisms” used to aid self-confidence.

We have been taught not to speak to strangers. We need mechanisms through which to approach those unfamiliar to us. . . . Following a leader is one of those mechanisms by which permission for inter-relating is given. A second method by which people overcome strangeness and gain the confidence necessary to approach one another is through participation in a common social network—a large family, a group, a neighborhood or work-related community. . . . The regularity and frequency of encounter leads to a nodding acquaintanceship that allows for the development of friendship. (1976: 196)

Lesbian and gay bars provide the social network or “family of choice” in which women can create mechanisms for meeting prospective partners or friends. Cruising is one of those mechanisms.

The third factor, in addition to personal biography and social framework, is intent. Women seeking to initiate an intimate relationship fall into three general categories of intention: those seeking a short-term relationship or one-night stand (this is generally thought of as an intent focused on immediate sexual gratification with no commitment or ties); those seeking a long-term relationship or life mate (this is generally

thought of as seeking a committed relationship that would involve emotional as well as sexual aspects); and those seeking any term relationship.

The ultimate stated goal of most women is to find their perfect mate followed by a lifelong relationship. It is more acceptable in the lesbian community and the society at large for women to cruise for long-term relationships than to cruise for sexual encounters alone. A lesbian can have many short-term relationships in succession and maintain her status among her peers, so long as she is ultimately looking for the “perfect woman” and not just a good time. Most lesbians engage in what has been termed “serial monogamy,” going from one long-term relationship to another.

Di (1992, 46-year-old, White, health care consultant):

Well, in my experience most women are looking for marriage! They want to nest. You know, we instinctually. . . . I think want to nest. And I think, in my experience in dating, you know, I had my little spiel which was, I’m not looking for a committed relationship. That I want to have a good time and date. . . . That I want to date more than one. And that’s an abusive situation in the lesbian community, I think. I’ve found it very difficult. . . . You get a name real fast if you date more than one woman.

If cruising is viewed by the group or the individual as being politically incorrect then a woman will not engage in behavior that risks or repudiates the principles held by the group. In other words, if a politically correct lesbian perceives that gay men only use cruising as a means to satisfy sexual desire through impersonal sex, she would not want to associate the term with herself or use the term to describe her behavior. Nor would she admit to cruising behavior on a questionnaire or perhaps, even during an interview.

Alice (1986, 32-year-old, White):

When I first heard the term [cruising] it had a poor connotation. It was negative. It meant that you were just going to slam ban thank you ma’am. That’s the impression I got, from the male point of view.

All three factors, personal biography, social framework, and intent are happening concurrently. We develop strategies—ritualized interaction—in order to deal with these socially messy situations. Cruising is one category of strategies that are used.

METHODS OF CRUISING

Styles of Cruising

As mentioned above, a woman's cruising style and the methods she uses will be a reflection of her personal characteristics and experiences, socialization, social context, social ecology, and intentions for cruising. If a woman wishes to meet a prospective partner she must decide if she will approach or be receptive to approach. If she decides to approach an unacquainted woman she may use an opening line, not dissimilar from a heterosexual setting (i.e., "Would you like to dance?"; "Can I buy you a drink?"; "Have you seen this video before?"), in order to initiate interaction. My research uncovered many variations of cruising styles which I have distilled into seven basic categories, based on method, intent, and investment (see Table 1). These seven types are intended to provide a general view of cruising styles.

Katherine (1992, 31-year-old, White, accountant):

There's also different styles of approaching people, but you got the sense that they circulated and they watched and they paid attention and they looked for the right face. And when they saw it, they zeroed in on them and depending on what kind of a person they were, maybe they would watch for weeks or maybe they would watch for ten minutes, depending on how much self-confidence they had . . . everybody had their sort of style of making contact, and some of it was through friends, you know, do you know that person, do you know that person, do you know that person, go up and introduce me . . . some people were very bold and just went up to people they didn't know and they would say things or ask to dance or offer to buy a drink or whatever.

The cruising styles are not, however, fixed or inflexible. A particular woman may overlap into one or more categories and may even use different styles during the same night or evening at the club.

Strutter. A Strutter circulates throughout the club, occasionally pausing to speak with acquaintances or friends. She projects self-confidence and determination in her search for a partner, but she is not as visibly overt as a Home Base Cruiser. Her intent is to find a partner. A Strutter is outgoing and usually knows many women in the club. She does not, however, stop and chat with people just for the sake of mingling—which

TABLE 1. Styles of Cruising

STYLE	METHOD	APPROACH	INTENT	INVESTMENT
Strutter	Circulates through club, occasionally stopping to speak with friends	Yes or very receptive	Find a partner, any term	High
Home Base	Stands in one visible location, surveying area	Yes	Find a partner, short term	Medium
Mingler	Comes in alone or with a group and stands or sits with a group	Yes with coercion or support of friends	Have fun with friends, maybe find a partner	Low
Ego Booster	Circulates through club, attempting to draw attention to herself	Yes	Impress herself or make a lover/jealous	Low
Sojourner	Circulates through club, periodically stopping to survey areas and be seen. She will distance herself from others.	Unlikely	Hopes to find a long-term partner	High
Woman in Waiting	Stakes out a territory to be visible, surveying area	Yes after long observation	Find a partner, long-term	Medium
Game Player	Uses a game, such as pool as method of approach	Yes through the game	Find a partner, any term	Low

would take time away from her search for a partner. If she sees a prospective partner among a group of people she knows, she can easily step into the group to be introduced. A Strutter will approach or make herself very receptive to approach. The length of involvement with the relationship is flexible and not pre-determined. However, like the Ego Booster, a Strutter needs to stroke her ego and likes to know that she can "strut her stuff" and not necessarily be tied into a relationship. Her investment is high, but she will rationalize her failure if she does not find a partner.

Chris (1986, 26-year-old, White, teacher):

They strut around. They talk to as many people as they can. They don't stand in one place like we normally do. They'll cruise around the bar and you'll see them talking to one group and then another group. They're presenting themselves.

Clubs with a circuit path (an aisle or walking path that encircles the dance floor or club) work best for a Strutter; however, it is not a necessity. The circuit path is the Strutters domain. She can both present herself as available while at the same time peruse for prospective partners.

Home Base Cruiser. A Home Base Cruiser is what most people envision when someone is described or labeled as a "cruiser." If there is an area in a club that has a prominent "lookout point" (a place where she can see most or all of the club and be highly visible) she will make this her "home base." She will remain in her home base for an extended period of time (20-40 minutes or more), continually surveying the area and targeting prospective partners. A Home Base Cruiser is very conspicuous and self-confident and may circulate occasionally but will always return to her chosen lookout point. A Home Base Cruiser is seeking a short-term relationship and will continue to pursue a woman as long as she determines that contact will successfully lead to a sexual encounter for the evening. She is a regular patron to the club, and her home base often becomes known to other patrons as her regular designated spot in the club. If she sees someone she is interested in she will approach them, using a variety of opening lines and methods for first contact.

Megan (1992, 24-year-old, White, X-ray technician):

... there is one girl that I know that is the cruiser from hell. She's this little Vietnamese girl and I see her quite often in different bars. She thinks she is like the biggest stud and it just cracks us up. That is a classic example. . . . I mean her sole purpose is to go out and pick up a woman. . . . and it's not a pretty sight. Well, she goes up and she'll light their cigarettes, you know. . . . she'll stalk her prey, you know and then they'll get a cigarette out and she'll be out there [she mimics lighting a cigarette]. . . . you know, hey baby can I buy you a drink, you know. And she does this. . . . Hey. . . . Frank Sinatra head shake (laugh). I mean, it's a classic. I mean if you saw it you would totally think cruiser, you know.

I observed in 1986, on a regular basis, three women whose actions typify what would be identified as Home Base cruising behavior. The women were well acquainted with each other and appeared to be friends. Typically they would enter the club alone, get a drink and take up position in their usual place, standing at the top of the stairs in the most prominent observation point in the club. As each of these women arrived they would greet the other Home Base Cruisers then quickly establish individual distance from them (typically two to three feet) to visually show that they were each alone. Once one of the women had identified a prospective partner for the evening she would approach the woman. As soon as a Home Base Cruiser was successful she would leave the club im-

mediately with her catch, only to return again the next evening, weekend, or even later that evening to repeat the same process. In all of my observations of these three women I never saw them leave the club alone.

As soon as a Home Base Cruiser determines she will not be successful with a prospective woman she breaks off contact and returns to her home base to prospect for another candidate. She may lower her standards as an unsuccessful evening progresses, and approach women whom at the beginning of the evening she would not have approached.

Bobbi (1986, 23-year-old, White):

My observation, they pick out. . . . they don't necessarily have to be too terribly cute. . . . In fact they can be quite homely. All they're looking for is a yes. Like when I think of someone who likes to just cruise people. [A particular woman] she'll walk into the bar she looks constantly. And you know, just anybody that shows her any attention she tries to cruise. . . . just for the night.

The Home Base Cruiser's investment is medium because her confidence level allows her to feel that she can find a partner when she "really" wants one. She will rationalize her lack of success as perhaps a night with poor prospects or her disinterest in "actually" wanting a partner for the evening.

Mingler. The most popular and frequently used style of cruising, the Mingler, comes in alone or with a group and will stand or sit with a group. She will only circulate with a specific verbalized or rationalized intent, such as going to get a drink from the bar, going to the bathroom, meeting with another group or person she already knows. A Mingler may, however, take the longest route to her "destination," possibly choosing a path that will take her near someone she is interested in meeting. A woman going to a club with friends or to meet with friends has a valid and safe reason (sociability) for being at the club. It may be that she intends to find a partner for a short-term or long-term relationship, but her friends provide a buffer against possible rejection. Friends also provide support to her in approaching or being receptive to a prospective partner. The following is an excerpt from the interview with Judi (1982, 20-year-old, White, emergency medical technician) which is an example of peer support:

J: Probably just sit back and tell my friends that I would like to meet her (laughter).

I: What if she made eye contact with you?

- J: I'd probably still leave it up to her. I don't know, I would continue the eye contact.
- I: What conditions would have to be met before you would approach a woman?
- J: I suppose it would just depend on my state of mind. How I felt. If I were seeing anyone else at the time. If I had been dared into it maybe (laughter).

The more women a Mingleter knows in the club the greater her social exposure and her subsequent extended number of potential contacts for partners. Also, women tend to look among their known group of friends for potential partners. This is one reason why in lesbian social gatherings there are typically many women who have been in relationships within their social network. Several women interviewed said that the only time they would consider approaching a woman they were interested in meeting was if the woman was standing or sitting with someone she knew. Then they could join the group and arrange to be introduced. A Mingleter will generally not approach another woman directly unless coerced or with approval from her friends. The investment for a Mingleter is low. She is patient and will often observe a potential prospect over an extended period. If she doesn't find a prospective partner during an evening out she leaves the bar content that she had a good time with her friends anyway. This group of friends, interviewed together in 1986, describe how this type of cruiser and they themselves as a group observe prospective partners over a period of time:

- Beth: They take their time. They pick out the feature in the other person that they want and then watch. They study them for a while.
- Jesse: Before we even approach someone we've had our eye on them for a while.
- Beth: We watch the kind of friends they have. And what they do when they're at the club.
- Bobbi: The more I like a person the longer I wait and check them out.

Minglers, comprising the largest group of the cruising styles, have the added advantage of being able to utilize a variety of settings. Open areas allow individuals more freedom of movement and interaction. A Mingleter would naturally be found in these areas, providing there are other individuals known to them in the area.

Ego Booster. Ego Boosters circulate throughout the club, often trying to draw the attention of everyone in the area. The Ego Booster is cruising to impress herself or someone else and may already be involved in a relationship with another woman. Her primary objective of cruising is to build her own self-confidence or make someone else jealous. She is very overt in her cruising style and may appear to be a Strutter; however, she is not looking for a relationship. An Ego Booster will approach, but, if she intends to pick up a woman only to show that she can be successful in this venture. Her investment is low as she is not really looking for a partner.

Dawn (1986, 23-year-old, White, student):

It's almost like they let down the barriers to present themselves to a lot of different people. To me it's an act of showing off. You're trying to show people . . . Maybe you feel good about yourself that night. You look good and you just go around and let everybody see you. It's kind of like a modeling show.

Like a Strutter, clubs that have a circuit path allow the Ego Booster to be visible to other patrons.

Sojourner. These are the ever-hopeful women seen standing around the fringes of the dance floor, bar, or pool table area. A Sojourner circulates around a club, stopping periodically to observe an area and be seen, remaining there for as long there are potential prospects. When the potential decreases she will float around the club to try different areas. She wants others to notice that she is available and, therefore, will distance herself from other women and present herself as interested; utilizing a different method of proceptivity. For example, if she is near the dance floor she may move her body with the music to show that she is receptive to dancing. Additionally, she may situate herself in close proximity to a potential prospect and try to establish eye contact with her.

Katherine (1992, 31-year-old, White, accountant):

Those are the people that would take two weeks or, you know, they would watch for six weekends in a row. They would come to the bar with hopes of seeing somebody that they thought was cute and they would gather information for weeks about this person and daydream about them and fantasize about them and do all this stuff. And then, finally, by some either highly orchestrated or totally unplanned event they would meet this person. And, proceed from there.

The confidence level for this type of cruiser is usually very low. Some Sojourners appear sad, projecting a defeatist attitude and quite often they receive just what they project. Other Sojourners may possess a happier disposition but still lack enough confidence to approach. A Sojourner goes to a club hoping someone will find them for a long-term relationship. Their investment is high because success is directly connected to their self-esteem.

GC (1992, 31-year-old, White, unemployed):

Well you have your little cruiser, one who just walks back and forth through the bar all night long. She's always by herself and it's like, you can tell when she spots someone she thinks is attractive because she'll stand ten to fifteen feet from her and watch and then hope for that eye contact.

The Sojourner style of cruising was illustrated in an observation made one evening at the most popular lesbian bar complex in the city examined:

I went to the Promenade with my partner and we stayed in NXS for most of the evening. It was a slow night for all three clubs. At the peak, NXS only had between 50 and 75 women. I only noted a few singles. There were three in particular that I watched. The first single woman was Hispanic and she came in, got a drink and stood at the dance floor rail. The second single woman was White and she came in and sat on the raised middle seating platform, on the top, at the end closest to the dance floor. The third single woman was White and she came in, got a drink and sat in a chair at a table between the two platform seating areas. After about ten minutes, from the time the third single woman arrived, the third single woman approached the first single woman, still standing at the rail, and asked her to dance. The first single woman, who had appeared to either be bored or sad, immediately smiled and her whole body image changed. The two women danced for quite a long time, talking periodically. They then went to the table the third woman had been sitting at. The second single woman was still sitting up on the platform, which was only a few feet away from the table where the other two women were now sitting. After a short time the two women decided to dance again and the third single woman asked if the second single woman wanted to join them. All three danced for a couple of long songs and all three went to the ta-

ble. Single woman one and three were sitting fairly close to each other and were having a good time talking with each other. The second woman was sitting on the lower platform at the table across from the two women. She was not involved in the conversation and was restless. She started out trying to be involved in the conversation. She sat up to the table and was leaning in. After around five minutes she leaned back and started looking around. A short time later she moved up to the upper platform above the table. The two other women didn't acknowledge her departure. They were involved in their conversation. A little while longer, the second woman moved down to the end of the upper platform, her original position. Single woman one and three dance periodically throughout the evening and were sitting at their table when my partner and I left NXS to go to Ms. T's around 12:45 am. When we returned to NXS at 1:25 am all three single women were gone. (Friday, 11-13-92, 9:00 pm to 1:50 am)

In this observation, I would characterize single women #1 and #2 as sojourners. Their lack of self-confidence was evident. They chose locales to stand or sit in which other singles would take note of them and waited to be approached. I would tentatively classify single woman #3 as a Home Base Cruiser. Since I did not see single #1 and #3 leave or later interview either woman, it is difficult for me to determine intent. However, single woman #3 quickly identified a prospective partner and made an approach.

Woman in Waiting. A Woman in Waiting stakes out a territory, arriving at a club early to claim a table for herself. She will choose a prominent location to see and be seen, circulating around the club periodically. A Woman in Waiting wants others to know that she is available; therefore, she distances herself from others like a Sojourner, with usually one location in the club that she claims for herself. She usually comes in alone and will present herself as available and interested. As a regular patron in the club, she studies potential partners over an extended period of time in order to be more certain of her choice in a potential partner before she considers approaching. If eye contact is continually maintained or there are other positive signs this often will speed up the process. She may approach another Woman in Waiting if there is interest in each other and time has passed and neither has made an approach to someone else. A Woman in Waiting is looking for a long-term, committed relationship. Her investment level is medium. She is patient and will watch and wait for many weeks.

Gloria (1992, 39-year-old, White, production coordinator):

I was more the person who waited and was approached. But I was real friendly with everybody and I would try and be friendly with everybody and it seemed like almost every time someone would approach me and want to get to know me a little better. And, you know, they had that sparkle in their eyes . . . (laughter) . . . and they wanted to be more than friends. And . . . but I was usually not the initiator.

A Woman in Waiting needs a prominent location from which to observe. Unlike a Home Base Cruiser, she is less overt in her method and manner.

Game Player. This style of cruiser uses a gaming area, such as a pool table as a means to meet a prospective partner. If, for example, a woman sees an interesting prospect playing pool, she can put her name on a play board or place coins on the table to challenge her.

Angela (1986, 24-year-old, Hispanic, student):

I always go to the pool tables. . . . I find it so easy to meet people playing pool; you put your quarters up, you challenge somebody, you play them. You got to get their name at least.

Pool etiquette requires that introductions are made prior to the start of the game. Casual conversation is as much a part of the game as the bids themselves (except during tournament play). A Game Player may approach a prospective partner in relation to the game. Her intent is to find a partner for a relationship of any term. Her investment is low because contact is maintained throughout the game and her public intent is to have fun and socialize. If the interaction does not progress beyond the game there is no visible sign of failure, thereby saving her being rejected publicly.

Almost all lesbian clubs have at least one pool table and most have additional games available; therefore, a Game Player can utilize each of these clubs for cruising. In addition to pool, there may be other games which allow women to interact as part of the game.

Utilizing the Term "Cruising"

Some lesbian feminists would adamantly argue that lesbians do not cruise; that lesbians do not have impersonal sexual encounters; and that cruising is a gay male phenomena. Part of the confusion in the topic of

cruising lies in the definition of the term itself. In *A Descriptive Dictionary and Atlas of Sexology* the following entry was listed:

Cruising—The overt and public search for a sexual partner. Often the partner may be anonymous and cruising is undertaken for a purely sexual release. Among homosexual men, cruising often involves moving from one bar, club, bath house, or party to another during the search. (Francoeur, 1991: 141)

This definition would imply that only the more flagrant and obvious acts of behavior would be defined as cruising. This definition of cruising privileges the aggressor as being the only one cruising. The passive recipient is seemingly not involved in the interaction, except as the object of the cruiser. Laws and Schwartz do extend the definition of cruising to the single's bar settings of both heterosexuals and homosexuals, but, again, cruising is restricted to "making temporary contacts for the purpose for recreational sex" (1977: 128-29) with the males (in heterosexual settings) in the active, initiator role (129). The language and definition reflect the larger society's privileging of the dominant, male role in sociosexual interactions. "As with symbols, differences in language can reflect differences in the needs and priorities of a given culture" (Blumenfeld and Raymond, 1988: 38). Where do lesbians and gay men who are not overt in their behavior fit into this definition? Is only the aggressor or initiator cruising?

Not only does the definition privilege the aggressor but the intent as well. This definition limits cruising to exchanges for immediate sexual gratification rather than long-term relationships—as if gay men only cruise for one purpose. "Proper" lesbians are only supposed to be interested in long-term relationships. Admitting that there are lesbians who engage in sex-for-the-sake-of-sex encounters would somehow damage their good image. It would also align them with those "naughty gay boys." But just because something is not politically correct does not mean that it does not exist. The phenomena exists regardless of the label attached to it.

Within the lesbian community there are very few words used to describe unique lesbian activity. Even for the most sacred of relationships, the lifelong committed relationship, lesbians may use "partner," "lover," "mate," etc., but none of these seem quite adequate to embrace the depth of the relationship. Confusion and misunderstanding is always a possibility when language is appropriated from one subculture to another. In the case of cruising, it is a term from the homosexual subculture, but one

which has been restricted to a narrow view of behavior. I could create a new term to describe the interactional processes of meeting prospective partners. This would undoubtedly satisfy those who are uncomfortable with the label cruising; however, for me it would just be a ruse to cover what might be perceived as an undesirable label. More importantly, cruising is already a term used by many in the community.

Respondent Definitions of Cruising

The definition of cruising is controversial not only for the researcher but also for the members of the community who use the term. This is not surprising considering the nonhomogeneous nature of lesbian subcultures. Respondents did not give a unified definition of cruising; rather, the definitions of cruising represented the totality of common themes. Women participating in this study generally defined cruising in terms of intent, gay male definitions, and/or by actor behavior. The following definitions are examples of the diverse perceptions of cruising by the women interviewed. For some respondents, cruising was a process used to meet women, in a general sense.

Kelly (1982, 25 year old, White, country club manager):

It's kind of like picking up on somebody you think is attractive and might like to go to bed with or something and cruising is just going through the motions or stepladder of getting to know them or getting in their pants and it's whatever you want to do.

For Kelly, cruising is a tool to be used for meeting prospective partners. Another group of respondents perceived that cruising could simply be a physical act of looking, without further intent.

Clara (1992, 24-year-old, White, retail salesperson):

For women I think generally there's less of that purely physical cruising with intent to act if you can. I mean, there's one thing about wanting to pick somebody up and it doesn't matter who it is, and there's another aspect of cruising that's looking and enjoying and appreciating but maybe not ever intending to doing anything about it.

The most common definition among the women interviewed described cruising in terms of the intent to "pick-up" someone for strictly sexual purposes (a one-night stand).

Leslie (1982, 24-year-old, White, bartender):

Everyone seems to attach their own definitions to that. Just looking for one night stands.

Micky (1986, 27-year-old, White, bar waitress):

... cruising is just that, it's looking for a fuck; that's just about all that it amounts to.

Elizabeth (1992, 31-year-old, White, attorney):

Cruising, in this case, is actively seeking out a sexual liaison.

For these respondents, cruising is a means with the end result being a sexual encounter. This perspective most closely resembles the larger societal view of cruising and typifies the view of gay male cruising. As discussed previously, this narrow definition does not adequately fit the diverse nature of the homosexual community. Some women believed that cruising was a method to attain a long-term relationship.

Katherine (1992, 31-year-old, White, accountant):

... Every woman that ever went into the bar was looking for a girlfriend. That was just it. Everybody wanted to have somebody to be living with. And unlike men who wanted to fuck, and maybe they wanted more than one in a night, and they didn't particularly give a rat's ass about having a relationship, it was about getting sex. For women it was never just that. They were always looking for a lover. And so, people would go cruising in this term, in the idea that they would be going through the bar looking for somebody that they felt was attractive that they wanted to dance with, that they wanted to sleep with. That they wanted to pick up, but the picking up was more than just one night of sex. It was always, you know, I'm in here looking for my next lover. Always. Always, always, always.

Katherine, at the other end of the spectrum, has found that women use cruising as a means to find a long-term relationship, while others interviewed felt that a woman could cruise for both short- and long-term relationships.

Bobbi (1986, 23-year-old, White, unknown occupation):

Going into a bar specifically to pick out one person or maybe a couple in case one doesn't take your drift (laugh) and present your-

self in such a way that they would want to have an intimate relationship for the night or for the next year.

Candice and GC point out that, over time, there have been changes in behavior related to cruising within the lesbian community.

Candice (1992, 44-year-old, White, computer consultant):

Well, yesterday it would have been going to a bar and maybe sitting at the bar and watching women and finding somebody that you thought was interesting and probably not doing anything about it. Cruising today is far more open than that. Cruising today is you go into a bar and . . . or wherever, and you see somebody very attractive and you go over and you talk to them. And you don't have reservations about doing that. You know, and if they're interested in you and you're interested in them after you talked then you do whatever. Or, you exchange names and telephone numbers. It's not that big a deal today.

GC (1992, 31-year-old, White, unemployed):

Cruising . . . I think cruising these days, it's a lot more sophisticated. It's more subtle, you know. You don't rake your eyes over the woman's body, you know. It's more eye contact and in certain body language. If you look at someone and catch their eyes and they smile at you and you kind of smile back and you can kind of feel the sparks and . . . It's just that it's a subtle art of flirting now.

Candice has found that inhibitions toward approaching another woman have decreased while GC notes a shift to a more sophisticated and subtle style of cruising. For others, the definition of cruising was more vague.

Club Owner (1986, age unspecified, White, club owner):

I think it's more or less seeking companionship.

Tonya (1982, 22-year-old, White, student):

You go out trying to find somebody to relate to in one way or the other, either physically or intellectually.

The differentiating factor among most of these definitions and the attitudes toward cruising is the intent for participating in the activity. As

previously stated, behavior that was considered promiscuous, male-like, and/or politically incorrect was discouraged by lesbian-feminists. Women who engage in cruising activity (and who care about peer opinion) must then either define their activity as something other than "cruising," cruise in settings away from their peers, and/or have "honorable" intents for cruising.

I believe the term is appropriate to describe the interactional process of finding a prospective partner so long as it is broadened to encompass the true range of women's and men's behavior. It could be argued that the term should not just be restricted to homosexual interactions. Heterosexuals cruise in the bars (they are just not as likely to use the term as homosexuals).

While gender differences have been clearly noted in the sociological and psychological literature, it is interesting to note the similarity in the following descriptions of lesbian and gay male cruising styles. Generally, it has been found that women are less overt in their cruising styles, but body language is the same (Wolf, 1979; Sage, 1979). Additionally, Simenauer and Carroll found similar descriptions for "pickup" behavior from female and male respondents speaking of heterosexual settings, with the exception that the male respondents reported looking for signs of receptivity while the female respondents reported on the process of presenting themselves as receptive (1982: 39). The respondents gave comparable descriptions of this cruising process. This clearly indicates a similarity across gender and sexual preference lines. This finding is not meant to discount the effects of gender socialization or societal edicts but to further emphasize the necessity for a more inclusive definition of cruising.

CONCLUSION

As is indicated by the research, cruising is a complex issue reflecting the diversity within the lesbian and gay community. My research has shown that previous definitions of cruising have privileged the behavior of males and has been limited to an overt style of cruising for the intent of short-term sexual encounters. This position has reinforced negative stereotypical images of gay men and the gay lifestyle in general and has devalued women's more subtle styles and longer-term relationships. I have broadened the definition of cruising to encompass a range of behaviors and intents which more closely coincide with the variety of meanings attached to this concept within the homosexual community.

Since 1979, I have observed many changes in the surrounding society, lesbian community, and lesbian clubs themselves. As a subculture, lesbians are becoming more visible; therefore, the society at large is increasingly aware of the diverse nature of the lesbian community. The lesbian community reflects the changing values and life patterns of the surrounding society, assimilating those values and patterns as well as creating their own. While I did find consistent interactional patterns in the form of the styles of cruising over the course of the study, I also noted an increased openness in public displays of affection and sexual activity in lesbian bars. As the fear of police raids in the clubs has decreased, young lesbians in the clubs seem to be bursting out of the closet—unapologetically—creating their own versions of what it means to be a lesbian, bisexual, or queer.

The method of cruising chosen by a woman directly relates to her own individual characteristics, the learned experiences she brings to the setting, the accessibility of and her intent for cruising. Specifically, the style chosen will be determined by (1) whether she is comfortable approaching an unacquainted woman; (2) whether she is looking for a short, long, or any term relationship; and (3) the amount of risk she is willing to place herself in in order to achieve her goal. The ease or degree of comfortableness a woman feels regarding approaching an unacquainted woman will be, in part, an outgoing, confident personality; a reflection of her ability to disregard learned gender socialization; a feeling of necessity, desire, or desperation; and/or the adoption of an assertive role.

A woman who is cruising will generally have an intended goal in mind prior to entering the cruising setting. My research indicates that the majority of women seek a long-term, committed relationship. This response not only coincides with female socio-sexual socialization but also politically correct lesbian feminist beliefs and behavior. For some, promiscuous behavior was simply a phase that some young lesbians go through in their process of lesbian identity formation prior to settling down into a stable relationship. Lesbian promiscuous behavior was viewed negatively by most respondents (except in the cases where it was seen as a phase), and it was not seen as a legitimate socio-sexual choice.

The amount of risk a woman is willing to place herself in to achieve her goal will be a reflection of her desire to meet a particular woman, her confidence level, her intended goal, and the amount of investment she places in the meet/date/mate process. My research indicates that a woman who is looking for a long-term relationship is willing to wait for

the "right" woman to come along and, therefore, will engage in a protracted cruising style. If her confidence level permits her to handle rejections in a constructive manner then she will engage in more assertive styles of cruising. Those women seeking more immediate sexual gratification may risk more in order to achieve that goal.

The most frequently used styles are the Mingler and the Game Player, which require the least amount of investment and risk of public failure while allowing flexible motives. A high percentage of women also fit the Sojourner and Woman in Waiting styles of cruising which I believe is a reflection of the difficulty women feel in the meet/date/mate process. A smaller percentage of women will engage in the Strutter style, due to the outgoing, gregarious nature required. The most infrequently used styles are the Home Base Cruiser and the Ego Booster styles, used by women who are looking specifically for a one-night stand (and are willing to be overt and "labeled" as such) or are cruising solely for narcissistic gratification.

American society, in particular, and the global society, in general, have throughout history restricted and impinged upon the sexual freedom of women. These restrictions have in large part stemmed from conservative social, moral, and religious movements. The lesbian feminist movement, while trying to create a healthier environment for women, has added to the conservative dialogue which has served to restrict sexual behavior and what is perceived as acceptable lesbian sexuality. These restrictions continue to create feelings of guilt for behavior (or thoughts of behavior) which fall outside the accepted limits of approved lesbian sexuality. I believe the time is long overdue for lesbians and women in general to open their minds, lift restrictions, and accept and embrace a broader range of socio-sexual behavior. My research will continue to evaluate and examine the dynamic lesbian social environment and the practice and politics of cruising.

NOTES

1. The Ecstasy Lounge was designed and created as a public sex club for lesbians. It was in operation in San Francisco from 1991 to 1996.

2. While I have never personally seen a room officially specified for sexual encounters in women's clubs I have seen areas where romantic and sexual encounters take place. Two clubs that I frequented in the early 1980s had loft areas with sofas and virtually no lighting. It was widely known in each club that the lofts were for "making out." Home Base Cruisers, in particular, might use the sofas for quick sexual encounters and

then return to their "base" in search of their next sexual partner. By the 1990s it was not uncommon in certain clubs to see sexual encounters—discreetly or not so discreetly—performed on the dance floor or primary bar area.

3. Snowball sampling involves asking research participants to recruit other friends and associates to participate in the research project. This type of sampling is particularly useful when researching marginalized populations who might be hesitant or fearful about meeting with a stranger. My sample is therefore not random, and inferences to the population at large cannot be made.

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