THANKS, BUDDY:
THE PERSONAL ASPECTS OF PUBLIC SEX SITES

by

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Traditional models of public sex among men continue to construct public sex sites as anonymous and impersonal. Humphreys's (1970) work established public sex sites as settings for quick, emotionally detached sex among men. According to his findings, most of the men do not identify as gay or bisexual. Recently, social historians argue that these sites provided for gay and bisexual men settings that promoted the recognition of their emerging sexual identities and communities prior to the Stonewall Riots. In this dissertation, I problematize the anonymous and impersonal assumptions of the earlier models and argue that public sex sites continue to serve gay and bisexual men by allowing these men a place to congregate with others like themselves. In face-to-face interviews with 30 gay, queer, and bisexually identified men, I ask questions that explore the interpersonal relationships that originated in public sex sites. I explore the ways that men who use public sex sites establish an ethic of caring and create a sense of community among one another. In my methods chapter, I continue the discussion addressing the role that sexual identity and "erotic subjectivity" of the researcher functions in research. Also, I address how relying on institutional review board's approval affects sexually charged research and maintains the silence surrounding sexuality.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of
Dr. Sherry L. Corbett
because she changed my life
and I miss her.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: WHAT'S A NICE BOY LIKE YOU...?

Every so often while visiting one of my favorite public sex settings, someone asks, "What's a nice boy like you doing in a place like this?" This question conjures up old stereotypes and fears about searching for sex with other men in public sex sites. I am a white, college-educated man who has the appearance and mannerisms of my middle-class education. While the man always asks the question in a humorous manner, we both understand what is implied about each one of us when he asks. As men in such a setting looking for other men, we become men without families, jobs, and friends; we are reduced to being only perverts. Gay and bisexual men have become accustomed to hearing constructions of male-male sexualities as pathological and dangerous (Epstein 1987; Terry 1995; Colter 1996; Scarce 1999b). The construction of the "diseased" gay man is the other side of the coin that constructs the heterosexual as healthy and normal. Heterosexuality has become normative, not just sexuality, but also an organizing tool of society. Heteronormative sexuality refers to the privatized and "non-kinky" sexual expressions of the committed heterosexual couple. However, diverse sexualities continue to survive in a climate that defines any transgressive sexuality as immoral and socially dangerous. Male-male sexual expression that occurs in recognized public sex sites is one such transgressive sexuality.

The men who visit these settings continue to be scapegoated by heterosexuals and gay men alike. Freedman (1989) discusses how the medical and psychiatric discourse and laws concerning the "sexual psychopath" of the first half of the

twentieth century effectively defined gay men as child molesters. In the early twentieth century, policing authorities often identified “gay” men based on where they met, such as bars, but also parks and public restrooms (Vacha 1985; Chauncey 1990; Howard 1999; Bergman 1999; Higgins 1999). For example, appearing in a cruisy park or restroom was sufficient grounds to label a man as gay. Gay male authors, such as Rotello (1997) and Signorile (1997) argue that gay male culture has become excessive and dangerous. They state that gay men, in order to survive, should embrace or at least aspire to monogamy, fidelity, and other components of heteronormative sexuality such as marriage, child-rearing, and privatized sexual expressions. These critiques of public sexualities among men reclaim for lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered (LGBT) individuals “a place at the table” (Bawer 1993). Mainstream LGBT organizing distanced itself from public sex in its attempts to secure legitimacy and citizenship for LGBT individuals. The marginalized status of public sex has impacted the relatively small amount of research addressing the phenomenon.

The seminal scholarship on public male-male sexual expression is Laud Humphreys’s *Tearoom Trade* (1970). Humphreys focuses on the men who frequent rest areas for sexual gratification. He states that these interactions are anonymous and impersonal. The assumptions of anonymity and impersonality have become the conceptual framework for nearly all the sociological work that has followed. In this manuscript, I problematize the assumptions of impersonality and anonymity that continue to influence the thinking about public sex sites. In this study, I explore the personal and social aspects of public sex sites. I rely on my personal and professional

history with public sex sites as ethnographic data combined with thirty face-to-face interviews with men who identify as using or having used public sex sites.

Consequently, this project explores the ways that these “anonymous and casual sexual environments” provide social connections for the men who use them (Delph 1978; Clatts 1999). This dissertation will use the men’s own voices and their subjective experiences to provide a more nuanced portrayal of public sex activity. The relationships that are created while cruising public sex venues suggest that these settings offer far more than quick, casual, and anonymous sex.

Unlike Humphreys, I do not focus on one specific site for my research. I am interested in the social processes that occur in those settings that fall within the parameters of the broader terrain of public sex sites. There are multiple settings with unique geographic, architectural, and behavioral characteristics that influence the participation of the cruisers. I argue that all public sex locales offer opportunities for social interactions. When scholars reiterate traditional explanations for public sex among men the social aspects of public sex cruising are rendered inconsequential. I am not suggesting that all public sex venues offer the same opportunities; the intended purpose of the site accommodates certain uses more easily than others. For example, a park more easily facilitates conversation than a public restroom. Nor am I suggesting that each site offers the same opportunities evenly throughout the day or year. Many settings are affected by seasonal considerations. Other settings are busy during certain times of the day. These busy times reflect typical business hours such as morning rush hour, the lunch break, and evening rush hour. Nor does every site

offer the same opportunities to every man who uses it. Racial/ethnic, ability, class, and age differences affect each individual man's experience in such settings.

The phrases "public sex sites" and "public sex" have a long history among cruisers. While the phrase "public sex" may invoke the idea of sexual expression without boundaries, men take great care when cruising in these public spaces. They often work diligently to hide their behavior, and the majority of public sex site patrons create zones of privacy in which to consummate their meeting. Humphreys (1970) comments on the men's needs for seclusion and privacy. He states, "Whether deviant or 'normal,' sexual activity demands a degree of seclusion" (11). In this regard, not much has changed. The men I interviewed repeatedly discussed their abilities to create privacy in public settings. The near invisibility of the sexual activity within to "outsiders" attests to the ability of public sex cruisers to establish privacy within these public places. Some cruisers expect privacy when they close a bathroom stall door when using a public restroom, much like others who use the restroom for its intended purposes. In a park, cruisers will go into the underbrush or hike off the path to create a sense of privacy and reduce offending other park users who are not there for sex. In short, while the term "public sex" conjures up a world of blatant and rampant sexual shenanigans easily viewed by the *innocent* public, such activities are the exceptions to the rule.

Public sex functions as a tool with which to expose the broader forms of regulation and control that support the private/public dichotomy (Leap 1999). The articles in Leap's anthology explore the impact of sexual identity and practices on notions of places and spaces. As he states,

Public vs. private does not refer to properties inherent in any locale, so much as it specifies two different interpretations...of the visibility or accessibility of a particular locale; that is public identifies a location which appears to be “open,” “accessible,” and “unrestricted,” while private suggests a location which seems more “sheltered,” “secluded,” or “protected from unwanted access by others” (9, emphasis in original).

Accordingly, the public and private split is “relative, a subjective interpretation of local terrain” (9). As the U.S. Supreme Court decided in 1986 in Bowers v. Hardwick, there is no privacy for gay sex. The arrest of Hardwick while in his bedroom by the state of Georgia provides a useful example of the subjective interpretation of public and private. The court ruled that the right to privacy holds only for heterosexual couples and not for same-sex couples. Privacy protects individuals not places. One’s sexual identity and practices place an individual within reach of the state’s regulatory arm, not the setting where they engage in sex. Leap claims “*all* sites of sexual practice are public locations, and any claims to privacy which unfold there are *fictional* claims” (11, emphasis in original). Leap points out that by defining privacy as fictional in the way that “it stands in opposition to ‘fact,’” the concept references “features which are not ‘inherent’ in a local terrain.” The Hardwick case illustrates the “fact” of state intervention. Privacy as fictional also reveals the subjective meaning of privacy. A closed bathroom stall door creates privacy for someone using the toilet. However, a closed bathroom stall door may not create privacy for someone engaging in sexual activities depending on who is defining the situation.

So, if “public sex” does not accurately describe the activities that occur in these settings, why use it? Scholars and cruisers alike continue to use the concept to organize their experiences and talk about their activities with one another. The legacy

of Humphreys's findings continues to emphasize the anonymous and impersonal sexual interactions that have become associated with public sex. "Anonymous sex," "impersonal sex," and "casual sex," while not necessarily public, often function synonymously for public sex. The language used to describe these behaviors reinforces for the men who use these locales that these behaviors are and should be anonymous and impersonal, even as their experiences contradict these constructions of public sex.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In "Sex in Public," Berlant and Warner (1998) state that they,

...want to promote the radical aspirations of queer culture building: not just a safe zone for queer sex but the changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or privileged example of sexual culture (548).

The authors discuss the privileging of coupled (hetero)sexuality into the private sphere while queer sex remains "counterpublic," neither in the public sphere nor privatized. As Foucault states in *The History of Sexuality*,

The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. ... the rest had only to remain vague (1990, 3).

Foucault's words are echoed in the 1965 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court granting married couples access to birth control. In Griswold v. Connecticut, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that married couples had a "zone of privacy" that must be protected, thus relegating the state out of the (heterosexual) bedroom (Berlant 1998). Berlant and Warner are interested in those practices, although not explicitly sexual, that are implicated in heterosexuality's respectability and status. These practices

maintain heterosexuality as the very expression of normal, naturalized interactions among and between the sexes. Berlant and Warner describe this way of understanding as heteronormativity. By this, they mean those structures of understandings, institutions, narratives, opinion culture, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent, but also privileged.

For Berlant and Warner, heterosexuality achieves much of its cultural intelligibility through ideologies of intimacy. The authors examine the ways that what is private (in this case intimacy) is also public, or more accurately, mediated through the public. First, conventional spaces presuppose a structural differentiation of "personal life" from work, politics, and the public sphere. In this sense, what is considered private becomes natural, pre-social, or pre-public. Intimacy cannot be analyzed since personal life is regarded as natural - pre-social. Second, heteronormativity links intimacy only to the institutions of personal life, making them the privileged institutions of social reproduction, the accumulation and transfer of capital, and self-development. Heteronormativity is maintained through public policies, inheritance and marriage laws, custody issues, wages, and architectures of public and private space that privatize heterosexuality and ensures its cultural and material stability. Third, by making sex seem irrelevant or merely personal, heteronormative conventions of intimacy block the building of non-normative or explicitly public sexual cultures. Sex that is not private is viewed as criminal and/or pathological, and heteronormative conditions deny private space and public expressions for queer sex. Finally, these three conventions conjure a mirage: a home base of pre-political humanity from which citizens are thought to come into political

discourse and to which they are expected to return to after the political conflict (Berlant and Warner). So, by linking sex with intimacy and intimacy with privacy, heteronormativity denies any space for *queer* sex, sexual communities, or “queer world making,” since queer sex can not be considered private. However, as social historians have argued, public sex settings were sites for the creation of a queer world for gay and bisexual men prior to modern gay and lesbian communities (Chauncey 1994; Howard 1999).

Sex and intimacy have not always been connected as currently discussed. The connection of sex with intimacy is a recent social phenomenon. As Halperin reveals in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, sex in ancient Athens was something one did to someone else of a lower status, and in “Sex before Sexuality,” he shows how sexuality has not always been “knit up in a web of mutuality.” In contrast, contemporary heterosexuality refers to relations of intimacy with another person, and sex is supposed to be the most intimate communication of them all. Sex in public becomes detangled from the heteronormative conventions of intimacy when we acknowledge the historical ordering of sexual acts and the contextual alignment of intimacy, sex, and privacy.

Community development is imagined through scenes of intimacy, coupling, and kinship. A field of social relations becomes intelligible as heterosexuality and privatized sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a tacit sense of rightness and normality. Queers, those individuals whose identities, behaviors, and bodies exist outside the boundaries of heteronormativity, have developed relations and narratives that are only recognized as intimate in queer cultures. For queer men, some of those

relationships include girlfriends, sisters, fuck buddies, and tricks (Berlant and Warner 1998). Making a queer space/zone has required the development of intimacies that bear little relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, or to the nation. Participants in these intimacies are aware of their subordinate position, culturally and materially. Men who use public sex locales are creating community, or social connections, through these “non-intimate” practices in counterpublics. Public sex cultures and queer sex cultures are created external to the “zone of privacy,” and society continues to pathologize and criminalize these sexual expressions.

Humphreys's *Tearoom Trade* (1970) was the first published scholarly attempt to explore the roles and types of men using public sex sites. *Tearoom Trade*, over 30 years after its publication, is still considered *the* source for information about public sexual activity among men. Humphreys explores the established culture of rest areas where men meet each other for sex. He put public sex on the academic map. His conclusions appeared at a time of cultural change for thinking about and discussing sexuality, especially homosexuality. Americans were relatively unaware of the emerging “homosexual” and continued to cast him or her as dangerous. Simultaneously, gays and lesbians were voicing their criticisms of the medicalization and criminalization of same-sex love. The publication of *Tearoom Trade* coincided with an increased presence of gays and lesbians in urban areas. The emergence of organized gay and lesbian communities produced national and personal anxiety (Faderman 1991; Adam 1995). The increase in attacks directed at gays and lesbians included job firings and raids on lesbian and gay socializing venues, such as bathhouses, bars, parks, alleys, and tearooms. These raids were not always passively

accepted. For example, in 1969 the patrons of the Stonewall Inn resisted, and for five days riots ensued. These protests, dubbed the Stonewall Riots, marked the symbolic start of the modern gay and lesbian rights movement in the U.S. (Duberman 1994).

Since Humphreys's groundbreaking work, others have followed. Scholarship dealing with public sex establishes it as an international phenomenon. Public sex has been researched in Canada (Desroches 1990), the Netherlands (Lieshout 1997), Vietnam (Aronson 1999), and Australia (Moore 1995). Scholars have studied the interactions of highway rest stops and other public restrooms (Troiden 1974; Delph 1978; Desroches 1990), parking lots (Ponte 1974; Corzine and Kirby 1977), and health club saunas (Leap 1990). Others have studied businesses that are used as cruising sites as well. These include adult bookstores (Tewksbury 1990), bathhouses (Styles 1979), and sex clubs (Brodsky 1993). With few exceptions, these studies continue to document the anonymous and impersonal nature of public sex sites.

Delph (1978) explores how policing the self in public is a powerful social obligation. In *The Silent Community*, he argues that these silent interactions contribute not only to formation of individual identities, but also to the sense of an identity with a community. The question thus becomes how do these silent seductions and trysts facilitate the creation of identity and community? Delph recognizes the multiple meanings and motivations for men using public sex sites. He asserts that gay men are using these settings to identify other gay men. Finding other men in public settings to have sex with provides a sense of community for many of these men, whether they identify as gay or not. However, Delph's use of a fixed homosexual identity limits his ability to accurately interpret the heterosexual men

using the public sex locale. Sexuality, identity, and behavior are far more complicated than many studies suggest.

Similar to Humphreys, Troiden (1974) and Lieshout (1997) observe men at highway rest stops, but they comment on the social aspect of the scene. Troiden comments on the conversations and displays of affection among the men. Lieshout observes Leather night at a highway rest stop in the Netherlands. He comments that cruisers in the Netherlands are no longer members of a “silent community.” Lieshout discusses the highway rest stop as a “supplement to the Dutch gay leather and S/M scene.” He comments on men who share rides to the site and then cruise independently. Lieshout states, “For many of the men who come on Monday night [leather night], the Mollebos [the site] also supplies a social function” (348). Although some researchers, Lieshout in particular, have noticed and commented on the social aspects of public sex sites, the majority of this research continues to emphasize the anonymous and impersonal sex that occurs at these settings. However, Lieshout reminds his readers that the Netherlands has a more liberal attitude and legal code in regards to public sexual expression among men, therefore implying that the social aspects are an artifact of liberal attitudes about these settings.

Several historical studies have explored the role of public sex sites in the creation of a gay male community or presence (Chauncey 1994; Bérubé 1996; Howard 1999; Bergman 1999; Higgins 1999). These studies discuss the role of public sex settings as a historical moment in the making of queer worlds. Chauncey links the emergence of contemporary gay male identities and communities to these spaces where men could meet and cruise each other. In New York, these sites were

mostly found in working-class neighborhoods. Chauncey argues that early queer men's visibility occurs among working-class men and immigrants due to the lack of privacy at home. The men shared parks and beaches with men and women who used these settings for similar purposes: heterosexual couples who could not go home and men seeking prostitutes.

Bérubé (1996) explores how the men seeking sex with other men used the public baths for sexual excursions. Across the country, the baths were a prominent place for men who sought sex with other men to congregate. As gay men became more socially and culturally viable, baths opened that explicitly catered to their sexual needs. Chauncey describes the gay baths as "the safest, most enduring, and one of the most affirmative of the settings in which gay men gathered in the first half of the twentieth century" (1994, 207). The gay baths play this role mostly because the baths were the only space that was exclusively queer. The bars, parks, beaches, and streets were shared with other neighborhood people. Howard (1999) documents queer southern histories. He reveals the sites where men in mid-twentieth century Mississippi located male-male desire. Bergman (1999) explores public sex in the gay resort Fire Island. He states that the ability of the Mattachine Society to stop the police raids on the Meat Rack in the late 60s reveals the importance of public sex in defining gay space. Higgins (1999) explores how men who used public sex sites in pre-Stonewall Montreal linked their behavior to developing a sense of community. Tearooms, saunas, parking lots, bars, baths, parks, beaches, and adult cinemas were places where gay men asserted their desires and claimed a space within which to

exist. These spaces play an integral role in the visibility of queer male desire and the policing of such sexual nonconformity.

These authors explore the emerging visibility of gay men's communities through their appropriation of public settings for sexual trysts and socializing. More accurately, they examine a community of men seeking affectional, relational, and sexual ties with other men in the later part of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. These authors find gay men's communities emerging in public settings where men could socialize and congregate, often where women's participation was limited - bars, neighborhood streets and parks, bathhouses, and gymnasiums.

BREAKING NEW GROUND

What existing studies lack is the voice of the men in the tearooms, parks, backrooms, and adult bookstore arcades. Contemporary anxieties around HIV/AIDS and the growing political clout and visibility of the LGBT community are facilitating an increase in the policing of queer sex zones. And, as Berlant and Warner (1998) assert, public sex cultures, which are often queer, are historically recent and pose a challenge to heteronormativity. Increasing the spaces where sex can exist legitimately, that is to say naturally and normally, will alter society's understanding of gay men who use public restrooms, parks, backrooms, and adult bookstore arcades for social and sexual encounters that facilitate a sense of identity and community. Older ethnographic studies have suggested that public sex settings provide opportunities for friendships. Historical studies have revealed the relevance of public sex sites for gay and bisexual men prior to the Stonewall Riots. In this study, I

explore the interpersonal relationships and communal aspects of public sex sites that continue to attract gay and bisexual men. I discuss how gay and bisexual men continue to use public sex venues for many reasons that are seldom explored using their own words.

Gay men construct their sexual selves through their participation in queer sex cultures, but also, by reading studies about gay men's lives (Levine and Troiden 1988; Irvine 1990). Studies that exclude their voices repeat the mistakes made a hundred years ago by sexologists. This dissertation, in contrast, provides a more accurate portrayal of public sex site use by gay and bisexual men, thus benefiting the existing analysis of public sex. These men's experiences are embedded within a contradictory context of challenging, radical critiques and traditional assumptions about stigmatized sexual behavior. This project produces evidence that continues these critiques and supports these traditional assumptions.

In Chapter Two, the methodology chapter, I will discuss the epistemology of the methods used during this research. Since this project is ultimately a study of "my people," I include an auto-ethnography to assist the reader to understand the impetus for this research. I also discuss how I collected the data. Finally, I hope to generate a conversation concerning the researcher's "erotic subjectivity" in the production of social and scientific knowledge about sexual behavior, identity, desire, and health.

In Chapter Three, I justify the reasons for problematizing the assumptions of impersonality and anonymity and situate this dissertation within that research context. I discuss the common characteristics of public sex sites based on participants' comments. Next, I discuss how men start to socialize in settings that are constructed

as anonymous. I reveal the participants' socializing strategies in these settings in order to counter constructions of anonymity as complete ignorance and the continued defining of public sex sites as anonymous and impersonal.

In Chapter Four, I present the men's observations about their interpersonal relationships that originated in public sex locales. The men's constructions of their public sex activities both support and challenge the traditional models of these sites as settings for quick, emotionless sex. Several participants' lived experiences contradicted their memories of their public sex histories. The men's experiences range from anonymous sexual tricks to long-term relationships that involve parenting.

In Chapter Five, I challenge the implicit charge against men who use public sex sites as irresponsible and uncaring. First, I discuss the influence of hegemonic masculinity on constructing public sex as impersonal. Second, I discuss the ways that men's caring has been constructed. Next, I examine how men care for one another in public sex venues. I focus on those interactions that do not develop into friendship in order to emphasize that even among "strangers," gay and bisexual men establish an ethic of caring with one another in these locales. I argue that gay and bisexual men in these settings overwhelmingly engage in caring behavior. The study participants expect to have their identities protected and to be respected. They respected the other cruisers' privacy and the non-cruisers' wishes to remain unaware of the sexual activities.

In Chapter Six, I establish that public sex sites continue to provide many gay and bisexual men a sense of community. I challenge the notion that using these sites as a means to develop a gay or bisexual identity and connect with the larger gay and

bisexual men's communities is a pre-Stonewall relic. I use Anderson's (1991) "imagined communities" to frame the participants' experiences of a communal spirit with other cruisers. The participants' comments reveal a sense of community that reflects their connection to other public sex cruisers that is distinct from their connection to the larger LGBT communities. Even though the discourse surrounding public sex within gay men's communities has shifted over the past thirty years, gay and bisexual men continue to experience public sex as solidarity building. This sense of community suggests an emerging alliance based on sexual desires, similar to sadomasochists (Seidman 1991).

In Chapter Seven, I discuss the findings of this research. I expand on the limitations of using a sample of convenience. I explore the limits of three expressions of male-male sexuality that are commonly reduced to gay sexuality. I recuperate the term "public sex" and broaden contemporary sociological conceptions about public sex sites. Finally, I discuss my hopeful aspirations for how this research will be incorporated into scholarship and the lives of queer men.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I first address my selection of qualitative methods informed by feminist principles for this project. Next, I discuss life experiences that influenced my decision to investigate this topic. Third, I discuss the research design development that shaped my data-collection techniques and my analytical approach. Fourth, I discuss the methodological and ethical challenges I faced during the process of seeking institutional approval of my research design, data gathering, and reporting of my findings. Last, I discuss the challenge that sexuality research poses to traditional qualitative methodologies.

QUALITATIVE METHODS AND FEMINISM

Three concerns affected my decision to use qualitative methodologies for this project. The first was my intention to include the voices of the men. I wanted to talk directly with them about their public sex experiences and allow their thoughts to be included in the report. The second was the project's queer perspective. In particular, this project broadens contemporary thinking about public sex by interrogating the traditional conceptual model of gay sexuality. My third concern was the very nature and purpose of this research. This topic is considered private, sensitive, and illegal. Moreover, I have undertaken this research project with an activist research agenda in regards to public sex sites and the men who use them. Such an epistemological challenge falls within the goals of feminist (Hill Collins 1990; Sandoval 1991) and queer writers (Warner 1990; Doty 1993; Berlant and Warner 1993; Namaste 1996; Seidman 1996; Epstein 1996). In this sense, my research methodology was

influenced by feminist principles, especially Black feminist (Hill Collins 1990) and Third World feminist frameworks (Sandoval 1991; Mohanty 1991).

I am mindful of Reinharz's (1992) discussion of the disagreements among feminists about what constitutes feminist research and feminist methodology. In addition, there are questions about whether men can claim a feminist identity, and whether they are able to do feminist research. Feminism can be the examination of how the larger structural features of a given society affect the genders. Agger (1993) has suggested that, in fact, it is crucial for feminist critical theories to join common causes between men and women in order to keep the focus on "the large structures enveloping all of us" (139), in order to provide a nuanced analysis of men's and women's lives. While some feminists may object to my use of the term "feminism" to describe the foundation of my research design, it was feminism that gave me a language to describe the political difference between official knowledge and the knowledge of members of disenfranchised or marginalized groups. Feminist theory revealed the political nature of what was defined as knowledge and what was not. Hill Collins (1998) discusses the two types of knowledge that exist in her analysis of Black women's visibility and the ways that Black women are silenced. First, information that is considered legitimate knowledge tends to silence and erase oppressed groups' experiences and interpretations from public record and history. Second, Hill Collins discusses the "collective secret knowledge generated by groups of either side of power that are shared in private when other side's surveillance seems absent" (49). So, while legitimated knowledge excludes the knowledge of oppressed groups, these groups, as well as more powerful groups, produce knowledge that is

shared with each other to produce understandings that counter the legitimated knowledge of a society. Feminist writing, especially ones that engage with multiple identity perspectives, speaks to me of the possibility of generating knowledge on behalf of disenfranchised groups - an oppositional knowledge. The knowledge produced by earlier feminist writing (Smith 1979; Stacey and Thorne 1985; West and Zimmerman 1987) as well as the ensuing critiques of that work (hooks 1981; Baca Zinn 1982; Hill Collins 1989; Taylor and Rupp 1993) has created a space within the academy for this project to exist, even as this space continues to be challenged. My dissertation would not be possible without the earlier contributions of feminist scholars and the theorists who critiqued them. While I prioritize sexuality rather than gender in my analysis, the tenants of feminism have influenced my topic choice, my approach to the topic, my sampling, and my reporting. In short, all stages of my research design have been impacted.

Feminist social science writings, such as those of Reinharz (1992), Fonow and Cook (1991), Nielsen (1990), and Stacey (1988) have also influenced my decision to use ethnographic methods and interviews for this research project. For example, Fonow and Cook identify four themes in the articles they compiled for their anthology of feminist scholarship: reflexivity, an action orientation, attention to the affective components of the research, and use of the situation at hand. While I do not employ all four of these themes, I make use of several of them.

First, I emphasize an action orientation within the research design. My scholarship is part of the activist intentions that frame my work. This project is the product of my desire to provide empirical evidence that more accurately reflects the

experiences of men having sex with other men in public settings. The findings challenge the official knowledge about gay and bisexual men's public sex by examining the personal aspect of impersonal sex. The action approach is present in my statement of purpose for this study, my topic selection, theoretical orientation, choice of methods, and how I define my role as researcher in relationship to the men I interviewed and observed and in academia. Fonow and Cook state that these themes within a research project disclose a researcher's action orientation while doing research. They state that having an action orientation requires a researcher to seek research methods that emphasize everyday processes and reduce the isolation between the researcher and the participants. My familiarity with public sex settings through personal and professional involvement provided first-hand observations of the settings and interviewing the men gave them an opportunity to learn about me and develop a sense of trust between us, thus allowing more in-depth answers during our interviews.

Second, activist scholars, regardless of topic and the label applied to their work, also share the idea of using the situation at hand with non-activist researchers. Much ethnography was started by a researcher wanting to understand how they and others make sense of their everyday lives (Bolton 1992; Lewin 1996). I have been involved with public sex settings in many different capacities over the past decade. I have been using these settings for sexual and social interaction since I was a young man. I have provided safer sex supplies, information, and harm-reduction assessment in these settings for years, both professionally and personally. As a community advocate and organizer for gay and bisexual men's sexual concerns, I have led many

community workshops dealing with men's sexual expression, providing information about physical safety, emotional and physical health, and pleasure. This is the community in which I live, socialize, and serve. I improvised a methodology that most resembles ethnographic methods with interviews because these methods were flexible and provided a means to observe and record the everyday actions of others and of myself in my everyday world. I improvised a methodology due to the lack of methodologies that address the concerns of scholars researching sexually-charged sites or who incorporate sexual identity or sexually engage with their participants. "As with a wide range of social phenomena that are not transparent to the outside and do not systematically generate data, researching [cruising sites] requires methodological and theoretical improvisation" (Hollister 2002, 72). I discuss the challenges of sexuality research later in this chapter.

Third, I employ reflexivity in this project. Fonow and Cook (1991) define reflexivity as the tendency to reflect upon, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process. As feminists extend this tradition by using it to gain insights into the assumptions about gender relations that underlie the research process, I use reflexivity to gain insights into assumptions about sexuality and heteronormativity that underlie social science inquiry. Consciousness raising is one of the ways that reflexivity is employed in feminist research and is common within gay and lesbian, ethnic, and queer studies. Bolton's (1992) work concerning gay men and their sexual practices is an attempt to reduce HIV transmission among gay men. Knowledge of the oppressed can lead to alternative ways of interpreting the world than those acknowledged by elites. Gay and bisexual men's subjective interpretation

of public sex provides opportunities to counter the knowledge produced by psychologists, criminologists, and police officers. This project builds on others who try to counter the omission and distortion of facts about homosexuality in general (Terry 1995; Rofes 1998; Scarce 1999) and, specifically, about gay and bisexual men using public settings for sex. This project is in a similar vein as Black feminist writers and theorists addressing the distortions of Black women's lives and experiences in historical and contemporary writings (Hill Collins 1990; Neely 1992; Hill Collins 1998).

Just as feminists have argued that positivist methods "skew knowledge in an androcentric or male-oriented way" (Reinharz 1992, 46), queer scholars contend that research-as-usual in the field of sexuality perpetuates heterosexuality's invisible privilege. Research-as-usual preserves heterosexuality's claim to authority and its naturalness. The only sexuality worthy of study then becomes those sexualities that disrupt or challenge normative heterosexuality. I join others who use ethnographic methods of observation, participation, and interview to gather empirical data to counter the heteronormativity of academic research, which renders invisible the power relations of contemporary sexuality (Bolton 1995; Kulick 1995; Dubisch 1995; Willson 1995; Lewin and Leap 1996; Murray 1996; Bolton 1996). Contemporary feminist ethnography is consistent with frequently mentioned goals of feminist research: first, to document the lives and activities of women, second, to understand the experience of women from their own point of view, and last, to conceptualize women's behavior as an expression of social contexts (Reinharz 1992). I employ

ethnography similarly with these three goals in mind for gay and bisexual men having sex in public settings.

While researchers using qualitative methods have a somewhat different set of concerns than researchers using quantitative methods, all researchers are concerned with their data reflecting accurately the topic explored in their studies. Qualitative methodologists are concerned with accuracy, precision, and breadth, whereas quantitative methodologists are concerned with reliability and validity (Becker 2001). Becker states that these are two different “professional communities, organizations, and cultures” (328) that are concerned with fundamentally different questions when evaluating the quality of research. I used face-to-face interviews in a private setting to establish an environment in which the participants would feel free to express their ideas, experiences, and understandings. This strategy allowed the participants to feel comfortable and to remind them that the interview was confidential. I would reveal my status as someone who uses public sex environments to build rapport and develop trust during the interviews. Together, these strategies minimized the power inequities during the interviews, encouraged a sharing of information between us, and facilitated a relationship with minimized expectations of critical judgments about the participants’ public sex encounters.

Stacey (1988) asks whether or not there can even be a feminist ethnography. She articulates the conflicts inherent with combining feminism and ethnography that place the “native” at greater risk for exploitation, manipulation, and abandonment. Ethnographies are interventions into a specific set of relationships, interruptions of people’s lives. My data was collected during interviews that established an artificial

setting for most of the participants. They were removed from their everyday world and reflected on those relationships. In this sense, they recreated their relationships for me since I was unable to observe the participants while they were in the actual setting. However, as Stacey cautions, activist scholars who use ethnography to minimize the distance between them and the participant must be aware of the potential detrimental outcomes to the participants due to the increased emotional connection between the researcher and the "native." Stacey concludes, "The uneasy fusion of feminist and critical ethnographic consciousness may allow us to construct cultural accounts that, however partial and idiosyncratic, can achieve the contextuality, depth, and nuance I consider to be unattainable through less dangerous, but more remote research methods" (26). I agree that scholars need to be aware of the pitfalls of ethnographic research, but contend the benefits outweigh the risks.

MEMBERSHIP ROLES

I began this research in a "complete member role" (Adler and Adler 1987). I am a member of the group that I chose to study. By studying a group of which I am already a member, my role as researcher most resembles Riemer's (1977) opportunistic researcher. Also, Hayano (1979) refers to the opportunistic complete member researcher as an auto-ethnographer. Auto-ethnographers are researchers who examine their own people. My same-sex attractions, sexual interactions, and use of public sex environments played a major part in my life and self-identity. While racial and class differences exist between the participants and me, I believe our shared history of public sex helped many participants to relate to me as a status equal. According to Adler and Adler, a researcher in a complete member role shares a

“common set of experiences, feelings, and goals” (67) with his or her participants. I am not suggesting that all men who use public sex sites experience them identically, or even that the men I interviewed shared some essentialistic quality. What is common, or widespread, among them is that they sought a connection with other men in public sex settings. As this research demonstrates, these connections occur in many settings, come in many forms -- sexual, social, emotional, and spiritual -- and are expressed in multiple ways.

Adler and Adler (1987) state “CMRs [complete membership roles] are able to gain the full openness of their subjects to an extent unknown by any other kind of fieldworker” (81). My complete member status provided insights about public sex that allowed me to ask different questions about public sex environments (PSEs) and helped build strong relationships of reciprocity and trust during the interviews. My unique position as member and researcher greatly impacted the information I was able to gather. However, my complete member status was a source of potential bias that should be addressed. My experience of creating my researcher role in a setting in which I am already a member is a common aspect of complete membership roles (Adler and Adler). My shared experience with the participants facilitated a smooth entrée into the researcher role. Since I was already a member, my entrée was not necessarily into the field but, rather, it involved introducing myself as a researcher. The limits placed on my methodology by the university’s human subjects review committee almost eliminated this task. While auto-ethnographers are studying their own people, only recently have ethnographers recognized the value of discussing

their own experiences and reactions during the research project in their final analysis (Reed-Danahay 1999).

I included my experiences with public sex during the interviews to minimize the colonialist aspects of this ethnographic study. I am conscious of the inherent power inequities of an interview, so I worked to establish as equal a relationship as possible during the interviews. Recently, many ethnographers have problematized the role of the researcher and explored the connections between their life experiences and their ethnographic research (Ellis and Bochner 1996; Okely and Callaway 1992). Auto-ethnographies have revealed the researcher's assumptions and theoretical framework in order to illuminate the motivations for their research (Brandes 1982, in Reed-Danahay 1999). Moreover, as Langness and Frank (1981) suggest, including the researcher in the ethnography can perform "repair work" among groups with stigmatized identities. In this regard, my story is included to assist other men who use PSEs make sense of their experiences. The inclusion of my experiences minimized the imperialist tendencies of this project by treating myself, the researcher, as another participant whose experience was no more or less valuable than any other's. Feminist methodologies consider the researcher's experiences, his or her values, actions, and reactions as data that needs to be presented. The researcher's lived experience and knowledge are tools qualitative researchers use to interpret the findings, but are also part of those findings. When researchers examine their own values, judgements, assumptions, and biases they are able to analyze and report findings that are authentic representations of research participants' experiences.

Researcher in Context

During my first year of high school, I became friends with a senior while running on the track team. By the end of the season we had “come out” to each other. I discussed with him my desire for sex with other boys and subsequent inability to find any partners, and he informed me about two restrooms at the local mall where I could meet men for sex. I was fifteen years old and knew nothing of this. So, the next time I was at the mall I went to one of the bathrooms. By the time I had my driver’s license almost a year later, I was aware of several other places in town where I could meet men for sex. My friend had taught me how to show my interest in sex in these sites without attracting unwanted attention. Also, by reading the graffiti on the bathroom stalls I was able to figure out other places and when to go to them. I was a sissy in the rural Midwest who knew he liked boys, but was not in a safe place, emotionally or geographically, to come out. These encounters at the mall and around town were a mixed blessing for me.

One night, I drove to a department store in town where I had met men before. I made eye contact with an older man whom I thought was attractive. We did a cat-and-mouse game of following each other around the store, always making sure that we maintained eye contact with each other. He then headed upstairs to the second floor, and we continued the game. I had done this many times at this store, and all the signs were there for me to know what was happening between us. He headed towards the bathroom, and just before going down the hall and leaving the showroom, he glanced over his shoulder, a common signal for me to follow. As my friend had advised, I waited several minutes to make sure that I was not misreading his signals.

I had been told to wait several minutes to make sure that the man was not unintentionally giving me signals and really was going to the restroom. Also, I waited because these restrooms were in department stores and two men going into the restroom together might attract unwanted attention. I waited until my past experience had assured me that he was interested in sexual activity and then headed down the hall toward the restroom.

I opened the restroom door as he was coming out. He stood aside as I passed and brushed up against him. He asked me in a loud, unfriendly voice, "What was that?" I turned around and bolted for the restroom door. He grabbed me by my winter overcoat and threw me against the wall then proceeded to drag me back into the restroom. I continued to struggle, unsure of what was going on. In the ensuing struggle he bloodied my nose and lip and blackened my eye. He revealed that he was an undercover-store cop. I thought my life was over. He dragged me back into the store, laid me down face up, and radioed for a squad car. As shoppers walked by to see what was going on, I closed my eyes, too scared to recognize someone recognizing me.

I had just turned sixteen and spent the night in jail. Once my family got me released, we went home, and I told a story that denied the incident and protected my closeted gay status. We did not know any gay people, and any references that were made about gay people by my family were judgmental or humorous with the punch line being at the expense of the gay character. I was the good son. I was the only son who was interested in going to college. I had never been in trouble at school, so it was easier for my family to believe my story, or, at least, not have to deal with the

alternative. My parents hired an attorney, and we started the process of fighting the charges.

My mother worked at a nearby hospital and asked one of the doctors for a respected attorney. He met with my Mom and me and suggested several strategies. I took a lie-detector test with just the attorney present and failed. He realized that he had not talked to me about what happened without my Mom being present. He said he would not tell my Mom the truth, and simply told her that the lie-detector test results were inconclusive. We plea bargained and my sentence was suspended as long as I met with my parole officer and a court appointed therapist. On my eighteenth birthday my police record was expunged as part of the plea bargain. Afterwards, my family rarely referred to this incident.

As I relive that night, which I have done many times in the days, weeks, and years that followed, I am convinced that I was set up. The undercover cop said he suspected me of shoplifting, yet he always made his presence clear to me and continued to catch my eye and stay in my line of vision as we maneuvered toward the restroom. Considering all of his actions, I was convinced that he was interested in having sex with me. As I learned many years later, my experience was very typical of men being arrested for public sex. I was entrapped.

The fear and loneliness of my queer childhood in rural Ohio continued to haunt me. I continued to use the public restrooms and parks in town to meet other men. These men became my only opportunity to discuss my sexual attractions and my fear of being found out. So, while I was embarrassed and ashamed of what I was doing, it was the only outlet for my adolescent desires and provided me a space and

group of men to talk about my feelings and get advice. While I never learned many of their names, they became my confidants. And, looking back, those men were a main reason that I was able to survive my rural Midwest adolescence.

I talked with none of my high school friends about my feelings and knew that none of the adults in my world would understand. There was only one "out" gay boy in my world, and he was used as an example of what not to be. In fourth grade, my math teacher asked in class about my tendency to have girl friends and not male friends. In junior high school, my principal, who was also the adult leader of my 4-H horse club, took me aside to talk about the club; he also used the opportunity to ask if my parents were concerned about my lack of male friends. In high school, my trigonometry teacher, who was also the wrestling coach, informed our class about a poster campaign that was going on around the school revealing my suspected homosexuality. Anonymous student(s) in my school were placing posters in the stairwells and halls warning others about my queerness. In my high school in 1985, gay meant AIDS. Gay men, even in my small hometown, were already aware of the fear and ignorance surrounding AIDS. I felt as if the adults in my world would not be supportive.

I left home in 1986 for a small-to-medium sized college in a small rural town in the Midwest. The student body and the school administration were decidedly conservative in their political ideologies. Once again, I found myself in a setting where it was not safe. I was able to find the restrooms and other public rooms on campus where men would cruise each other. Once again, I was embarrassed and ashamed of my behavior. But, this is how I met my first boyfriend, who was

instrumental in my early coming-out process, and our friendship continues today even though we live in two different regions of the country.

During my junior year, I was working for a sociology professor. I had already taken several classes with her and was her undergraduate assistant. We were quickly becoming friends. We worked together about fifteen hours a week, so I was often alone with her and we used that time to get to know each other. I was depressed about my sexuality and talked with her about tearooms under the guise of her deviance class and revealed my prejudice against these men. Perhaps she knew what I was really talking about because she immediately chastised me for being judgmental and started talking about structural features of society that relegated gay men and lesbians to the margins of society. She thought these men were brave for the creative ways they developed to meet each other and be sexual in a society that was increasingly treating them as killers, as “vectors of transmission.” Public sex users were already marked as closeted bisexual men who were infecting their wives and ruining the solidity of the family. This was the first conversation that I can remember having that recognized sexual expression as worthwhile for its own sake and connected my internalized homophobia with larger issues of social inequality.

My studies, informed by feminism, only strengthened these connections. I viewed public sex as a creative response to harsh societal sanctions and as acts of political resistance. My consciousness reflected my new attitude about public sex, those men, and myself. At this time in my life, I started to view these men as comrades, friends, and lovers, three years after meeting my first boyfriend at a campus cruising site. My consciousness was starting to catch up with my actual

experiences. I shared stories about being gay and cruising for sex with the other men that I met in campus tearooms. We told each other about our fears of being outed, who to look for, who to avoid, and how not to get caught. This was the same time that I slowly came out. By the end of college, I was a gay activist, which at the time was synonymous with being an AIDS activist. I was speaking on panels about being gay and giving presentations to inform other college students about safer sex and the AIDS virus. However, I was still secretive about my use of public restrooms for sex, except with the men I had met in such places.

I entered graduate school an eager young gay scholar and community activist. I wanted to rid the world of homophobia, AIDS, sexism, racism, and heterosexism. I continued my volunteer work with the local AIDS service organization as a member of its Speakers' Bureau. My partner at the time was president of the board, so I heard many conversations about the agency's planned risk reduction programs. One proposed program would have sent volunteers into parks known to be frequented by men seeking sexual activity to distribute condoms, lube, and literature. This plan was eventually turned down, as the agency's board believed it was too risky an activity to conduct in such a conservative city.

Academically, I jumped in with both feet, but soon realized that there were both acceptable topics of study involving gays and lesbians, as well as some very unacceptable ones. I did my thesis on gay and lesbian adolescents and suicide risk. While this is a very worthwhile area of social research, it is also one many would agree is academically "acceptable" and non-controversial. Privately, I continued to read in the popular and academic literature about gay men and their sexual goings-on.

More importantly, I started reading Black feminist writers, queer writers, and post-colonialist writers. These women and men changed the way I perceived the world and how I could approach social research.

After I finished my thesis, I left the Midwest, and moved to the Rocky Mountains to start a Ph.D. program. I realized that I wanted to study queer people from a queer perspective, and doing so would require me to improvise methodologies and challenge existing assumptions about sexuality, knowledge, and science.

This is where I started this project: A queer man earning a Ph.D., whose experiences of public sex environments were more than what the academic literature presumed to exist. Public sex locales offered many opportunities for friendship that were not being discussed by individuals who created legitimate knowledge and I was slowly becoming someone who could create such knowledge. I did not want to give up my personal self to become an academic and so embarked on a course of study that recognized that everyday lives are problematic (Smith 1987). The presence of men having sex in public defies cultural expectations that public spaces are strictly heterosexual. The public's response to men having sex with other men in places such as parks, public restrooms, and saunas reveals the homophobic assumptions that underlie desire, sex, public space, and decency. PSEs and the men using them disrupt conventional ideas about sexuality, public space, identity, and institutional power structures (Leap 1999; Diehl 2000).

As I read the academic literature about public sex among men, I was aware of the lack of a thorough depiction of these settings and of the men involved. Academically, the most complete work seemed to be emerging out of gay and lesbian

history projects (Chauncey 1994). This study emphasized the historical aspects of public sex settings by discussing the role they served in facilitating the emergence of gay identities and communities. The suggestion seemed to be that this role, or its usefulness, was extinct and irrelevant in regard to contemporary gay and lesbian communities. I read each article or story wondering when I was going to get to the *other* aspects of public sex among men. When was I going to read about my other experiences that were friendly, affectionate, romantic, and social? I continued to seek out literature that discussed the other aspects of public sex cruising. I found this data in the fictional work of gay male writers such as Rechy (1984), Holleran (1986), and Maupin (1989), to name a few, but not in academic writings.

EVOLUTION OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

After starting my Ph.D. program, I was hired by the local AIDS service organization as a public sex outreach assistant. I wanted this job for three reasons. First, I needed a summer job to pay my expenses. Second, after never being able to get such an outreach program off the ground in the Midwest, I wanted to see how one worked. Third, I felt most AIDS service organizations' prevention programs were ignoring men who used public sex settings.

The job entailed going into the setting where men were cruising for sex or having sex. I accompanied the program's coordinator, in accordance with the agency's policy of ensuring our personal safety and providing a check for the workers to maintain the established protocols for doing outreach in the field. We always entered the sites together and then parted ways, but we maintained eye contact as best we could. Our job was to meet men, identify ourselves as outreach workers, discuss

what sexual activities they engaged in and assess their potential risk for HIV, and hand out safer sex supplies, usually condoms, lube, and literature.

After years of public sex activity and presenting safer sex workshops, I learned two surprising things during this job. First, these men did not want to encounter outreach workers in the public sex setting. The men told us about how the presence of outreach workers at another site had alerted local police to shut it down. The site's closure forced the men to become more vulnerable to detection, violence, and arrest because they had to travel further distances and use more visible sites. The closing of the other site forced the guys to take more risks -- often risks they would not have taken otherwise. Our agency worked with the local police departments to assure that if we were swept up during a raid we could identify ourselves and be released. We informed the police of our presence in the settings, without revealing where we were working or which day we would be doing outreach. Even so, one rest area had been closed down in the northern part of the state due to another agency's outreach workers working with the police departments. As a result of such liaisons with police departments, the men in the site preferred we not be there and bluntly told us so.

After several months of being in the settings and talking with these men, their blunt rejection of us turned to casual ribbing. They greeted us as "the sex police." Nonetheless, over time these men became great sources of information and always talked with us when we showed up at the site. They provided information about the other men in the setting, such as what type of man they found attractive, what sexual activities they typically engaged in, how often they were seen in the park, and the

other settings they frequented. They also told us about other sites we should check out.

Second, these men did not want to talk about sex; they wanted to have sex. In every setting, we came across this same situation, for several reasons. First, the norms of PSE culture do not encourage much conversation, particularly with respect to giving your name prior to any other activity. Second, we discovered that the men did not want their sexual arousal to be diminished by talking about risk, transmission, symptoms, infection, and disease. Third, as we became known in the settings as “the sex police,” some of the men would avoid us, some would refuse to talk with us, and some would leave. Our presence affected the sexual energy of the site. Several of our key informants revealed to us during unidentified interviews (Riecken 1969) that we reminded the men of HIV.

I quickly became critical of the program’s effectiveness, even as it was getting safer sex supplies to men in PSEs. It seemed to be meeting the needs of this population of men based on the agency’s grant requirements, but it was difficult to establish whether these men were using the condoms. On subsequent visits, we found most of our literature and supplies thrown away or simply discarded in the underbrush. My interest in sexual health conjoined with my queer activism and I started thinking about turning this into a research project for my dissertation. At that time my interest was in providing a theoretical basis to enable service agencies to meet the needs of men in public sex settings. In fact, I wondered whether outreach in these settings was the most effective way to meet the men’s needs.

Sampling Method

My sampling method was greatly shaped by the university's Human Subject's Review Committee (HRC). The first proposal submitted, which I describe below, drew several criticisms. The two most common criticisms were about my recruitment methodology and the role of minors in my research. In the proposal, I outlined the participant observation component of my study. I included my use of data gathered or interviewees recruited through contact in public sex environments. Bolton (1996) discussed the use of data gathering during unstructured interviews after sex. His research concerned HIV/AIDS, safer sex, and men. He noticed, talking with men after having sex with them, discrepancies between what they said they would do and what they actually did. He used this data in his research. He argued for the recognition that in specific circumstances and cultures, sexual activities should be considered appropriate means for data gathering and recruitment. I proposed this recruitment method as part of a broader critique of traditional research methods. Such methods maintain the silence surrounding the political forces that influence science and the study of sexuality. This was viewed by the HRC as deceptive recruitment and controversial methodology. HRC stated, "Your recruitment methods raise questions. The methods proposed are not appropriate or traditional. Please address." In order to be granted approval, I was advised by the committee's secretary to remove the participant observation component from my proposal.

The committee's concern for minors involved in my study was repeated frequently. They mentioned three times in their critique my need to "insure/confirm. . .that no minors will be involved" in my research project. Also, I needed to "state

that subjects must be 18 years of age.” Finally, I needed to “include child abuse boilerplate information.” They wanted me to provide information for minors about what to do in case of being abused while cruising for sex. Also, I needed to let minors know what my legal requirements were if they reported sexual abuse to me during the interview. I was struck by the attention the HRC gave to the issue of minors in my study, especially since twice in my proposal I stated volunteers would have to be 18 years old, and I stated it once on my informed-consent form. I would not be talking with minors and felt as if I had stated it clearly. The committee’s assessment of my proposal revealed its underlying suspicions that these men were not only gay but also pedophiles. Society’s discomfort with gay men and their sexuality quickly becomes an implied accusation of pedophilia for any gay man who ventures into the public realm, especially in a setting where children are present (King 1998). The current allegations of child abuse being leveled at the Catholic Church, and the church’s response that the problem is due to gay priests, is only the most recent example of such accusations. The committee reverted to stereotypes about men who use PSEs to reject my proposal.

I called the executive secretary to discuss the issues raised by the HRC. She stated that the committee members were concerned about interviewing children about having sex with adult men, a felony. When I told her this was not the topic of my research and informed her of my purpose, she repeated the committee’s concerns. I discussed with her current media portrayals of these men and the critical bent of my research. We discussed the social prejudices faced by my sample and the need for research that provided more complete information about this social phenomenon. She

stammered about the minor's issue when I pointed out the age of volunteers was stated three different times throughout my application. She suggested that I include the child abuse boilerplate information to appease the committee. My recruitment methodology was unacceptable and would not be allowed; she told me that I would have to rewrite that section with a more traditional approach in order for the committee to even consider accepting my project. Consequently, I included the child abuse boilerplate information, dropped the participant observation aspect of my study, and resubmitted my proposal.

The revised proposal review came back with more HRC concerns. This time, they claimed that I needed to address the participants' confidentiality, since I might know some of my participants. The committee felt that my use of the term "anonymity" was misleading and suggested I change the terminology. Also, I was told the child abuse boilerplate information was no longer needed, since I had demonstrated in my revised proposal that minors would not be involved in my interviews. I had stated for a fourth time that I was only interviewing adult men. I revised and resubmitted the proposal.

My third proposal review came back with the note that it would be accepted if I would make one change: my idea of confidentiality was "misleading" since I would not know all my interviewees, and I should change the terminology to "anonymity." So, I changed it back to the original wording.

Given the limits placed on the project to gain HRC approval, my work experience, and the information I sought, I decided that face-to-face interviews were my best chance for asking the questions I wanted. I recruited participants through

announcements at community meetings, an advertisement in the newsletter for MSMs (men who have sex with men, but do not necessarily identify as gay, bisexual, or queer) from the local AIDS service organization, a flyer distributed to HIV-negative men in a national study dealing with sexual behaviors, word of mouth, online chatrooms, and interviewees telling friends and having them contact me, or snowball sampling.

All 30 interviewees self-identified as men who use public sex environments as places to have sex with other men or to cruise for sex and then to go somewhere private. I used interviewees' self reports to gather their demographic information. Of the 30 men, all but five identified themselves as gay. One of the three men to identify as queer was a younger Latino man of Colombian origin. He is active in youth organizing and, at the time of the interview, was doing HIV outreach in youth communities of color. He used "queer" because he viewed it as "much more of a political thing that encompasses sexual identity and racial identity and all other aspects of my life" and as a "recognition of broader social justice issues. I'm not just a man having sex with men. I'm a person worried about race, class, sex, gender and all inequalities within our society and [queer] kind of encompasses it all." One younger Hispanic man identified as a closeted bisexual and an older Caucasian man identified as heterosexual but considered himself "bi-experimental." He used heterosexual because he was "concerned about judgments or having to explain himself." These two men were the only men in my sample who did not feel like they were members of the larger gay men's communities. The disproportionate cases of men identifying as gay was anticipated due to the sampling methods used. Since the

interviewees were predominantly gay men and I was conscious of time constraints, I decided to focus my study on gay and bisexual men's experiences. This decision was also made to counter the attention heterosexually identified men have received in the literature concerning public sex (Humphreys 1970; Desroches 1990; Desroches 1991).

My interviewees predominantly identified as White/Caucasian/Anglo ($n = 23$ or 77%). Six of the men (20%) identified as either Latino/Hispanic/Mexican and one man (3%) identified as Asian American. While my sample lacked African American men, men of color constituted 23% of the overall sample. This closely reflects the state's racial composition figures. According to state census data for 2000, whites comprised 74.6% of the state's total population (<http://www.dlg.oem2.state.co.us/demog/CensusData/2kRace.htm>).

The men ranged in age from 22 to 54 years old. The majority of them were in their twenties and thirties. Four of the men were in their forties and four were in their fifties. Three were still enrolled in college when I interviewed them. Three of the men were involved in sexual health outreach jobs either at the time of the interview or had been within the past four years. The other men were waiters, florists, lawyers, psychologists, writers, and researchers, as well as an architect, engineer, salesman, accountant, client services representative for an internet company, commercial insurance agent, artist/masseur, retired accountant, electrician, human resources manager, and two, a couple, had recently started a gay adult film company. One man revealed his HIV seropositivity; the rest did not discuss their serostatus.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred in two distinct waves. The first started with my public sex outreach assistant job. It began in May 1996 and utilized nonsystematic fieldwork. At first, I just observed and performed my job duties, requiring the gathering of information to fulfill grant obligations. As a researcher, I was concerned with exploratory issues. I had not really observed different types of public sex settings, so I made notes about the types of men who used the different settings, who would talk to us, and cultural and structural characteristics specific to different locations.

The second wave of data collection began with the recruitment of interviewees for taped face-to-face interviews. In June 2000, I interviewed my first participant. Over a seventeen-month period I interviewed 30 men aged 18 years or older. I used a semi-structured interview schedule that covered the following areas of interest:

- ◆ Demographic information;
- ◆ How they learned about public sex environments;
- ◆ When they first started using public sex environments;
- ◆ Whether they knew any of the men from the sites;
- ◆ What type of relationships they had with the other men;
- ◆ Whether their friends knew of their use of public sex environments;
- ◆ Whether they had ever been arrested for having public sex;
- ◆ Whether they had ever visited a therapist because of their public sex;
- ◆ Whether they experienced a sense of community with the men;

- ◆ Whether they thought men took care of each other in the settings.

The interviews allowed each man to tell me, in his own words, what was important to him about his public sex experiences. During the interviews, if the men had difficulty with a question, I reminded them of their freedom to not answer any question and to end the interview if they felt uncomfortable. Additionally, I offered to talk off the record about their discomfort. Only once did an interviewee ask to take a break. He was crying softly because the interview was reminding him of an old boyfriend he had met in a bathhouse. He went outside to smoke and compose himself and then returned to finish the interview. Afterwards, he thanked me for letting him be a part of my research saying that he had needed a reason to think about his public sex. No man refused to answer any question, and all thanked me afterwards for giving them the opportunity to talk about their public sex in such a directed way. Many said this was the first time they had ever gone back and thought about how they got started and what types of friendships they created in these environments. They stated that the interview had made them think about their public sex in a manner that reminded them of many things that they ignored or had not thought about in a long time.

I conducted the interviews in settings that the men selected. Eleven were at my apartment, seventeen were at the men's homes, and two were at their work offices. The interviews lasted from 50 minutes to an hour and 15 minutes, and were tape recorded after the men read and signed the informed-consent form. I never gathered any contacting information from the men and asked them to sign their informed-consent form with a pseudonym of their creation. This was one of many ways that I encouraged the men to make the interview a joint collaboration between

the two of us, instead of them volunteering for me. I wanted to equalize the power differential as much as possible to reduce the distance between participant and researcher. I was enacting the ideas about community and caring that I was asking about in the interviews. I informed interviewees that only one other person would hear their interviews, the friend I hired to transcribe the tapes and that once the dissertation was completed, I would destroy the tapes. Since I did not gather any contact information about the men and did not keep a master list connecting their pseudonym to their real name, this convinced the HRC and the men that their confidentiality and/or anonymity would be preserved.

Before turning on the tape recorder I made sure the participant was comfortable and went over the tentative interview schedule. I told each to feel free to ask me any questions during the interview. Once they signed the consent form and verbally indicated they were ready, I indicated that I was turning on the tape recorder. During the interview, I encouraged the men to revisit any questions that had already been discussed, as new memories might emerge during the interview. After each section of the interview was over, I asked if there was anything else they would like to add or clarify. The interviews, at times, were more like structured conversations, as I employed self-disclosure and provided pertinent information (Oakley 1981). I continually negotiated when self-disclosure was necessary for the sake of the interview rather than just for my need to self-disclose (Reinharz 1992). I did not want my self-disclosure to influence the participants' recollections.

As stated previously, my interviews were influenced by feminist principles. During the interviews, I rejected the traditional method of interviewing that stresses a

detached researcher. I actively worked to bridge the gap between the participant and myself. I believed that due to the sensitive nature of the topic, my acknowledgement of my public sex allowed the men to answer my questions with little concern about prejudicial treatment from me. One interviewee confirmed this when he said,

You'd have gotten a very different interview if [you hadn't laughed at] one of the first things I said. Your kind of laugh was [like], 'Oh, God. Been there, done that.' If that kind of thing hadn't happened, this would have been a much shorter interview and it would have been a much more [a] listing of things.

If he had not known about my public sex history, he might have just provided a list of activities, places, and frequencies, which was only part of the information I was seeking.

After each interview, I invited each man to call or email with any questions, concerns, or more stories about their public sex or the interview. I also encouraged the men to call me just to check in and see how the project was moving along. While no participant has called or emailed me, I have seen several of them since our interview and been asked about my progress on the project. Once again, the influence of feminist principles is present, as I allowed for relationships to develop long after the interview was completed (Nielson 1990).

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed in their entirety. I analyzed the data using principles of qualitative analysis (Lofland and Lofland 1995) and inductive analysis (Patton 1987). As Patton states, "In qualitative fieldstudies, analysis is conceived as an *emergent* product of a process of gradual induction" (181, emphasis in the original). The emergent and inductive quality of field study analysis requires an

open-ended approach and is considered by qualitative analysts as a creative process (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Lofland and Lofland 1995). The notion that romantic inspiration will pull it all together has been discredited. Ethnographers agree that “working at” analysis relies on the analyst’s knowledge, training, and reflexivity.

The patterns, themes, and categories emerge from the data when using inductive analysis rather than the categories, themes, and patterns being decided prior to data collection and analysis. According to Patton (1987), the analyst looks for natural variation in the data by paying particular attention to variations in the responses. Two types of patterns emerge from data: indigenous typologies and analyst-constructed typologies. Indigenous typologies refer to the variations in categories that the interviewees are aware of and are using in their descriptions of their experiences. Analyst-constructed typologies involve the analyst finding categories, themes, or typologies that exist in the interviewees’ responses that they are unaware of. I examined the transcriptions of the interviews for common themes, typologies, and categories. I also examined the interview transcripts for variations in experiences and meanings based on specific locales and age. I was looking for both types of typologies, but the data provided far more analyst-constructed typologies. From my study it became clear that there were few men who discussed their public sex behavior with their friends or other PSEs users to create a common or unifying narrative about their experiences in PSEs.

After I had interviewed 27 men, I started noticing common typologies, categories, and themes. I continued my interviews with three more men and, after these three interviews produced no new categories or typologies, decided to stop

conducting interviews. I organized the participants' comments based on specific areas of interest that emerged from the interviews. I organized the comments to explore how men interacted in the public sex settings. I observed common themes about what types of relationships men engaged in with other men they met while cruising the settings. My overarching concerns during the interviews were how men experienced a sense of community with other men from these settings, and how the men supported a caring ethic in public sex sites. I decided to stop interviewing men as these questions repeatedly received similar answers. This decision was also based on my time constraints and funding concerns. It was time for me to focus on interpreting my data and writing the results of my interviews. My committee agreed that 30 interviews were sufficient given the secretive culture and the illegality of public sex.

METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

This project provided many challenges during its course, affecting my research design, data collection, data analysis, and writing. As discussed earlier in this chapter, my research design required several revisions. First, this project started as an ethnographic participant observation project, but it gradually became an interview project. Therefore, I depended on the participants' observations during the interviews, rather than on my own. This posed an obstacle that I managed by paying close attention to any discrepancies in their answers during the interview. This became important during interviews when the men appeared to contradict themselves. The men were not lying to me. Rather, they had organized their experiences in PSEs to support the assumption that all PSE activity was anonymous and casual. However,

when the men were questioned about these contradictions, I observed them going through a process similar to one I had gone through during my junior year of college. The men were first confused and then began to recall memories that reflected their experiences rather than the traditional conceptualizations they had used to explain their public sex encounters. For example, one of the participants told me he did not date men from PSEs. Later, during the interview, he discussed a date he had had with someone from a PSE. After I asked him about the discrepancy, he went through the process of sorting out the contradiction and then re-addressing the earlier question. For several men, once someone became a friend or a date, they stopped viewing the person as someone from a PSE, even though they did not forget where they had met. Often these new understandings allowed the men to view their public sex in a different way, revealing to them how they relied on cultural assumptions to make sense of the men they met at the sites and their experiences there. Both the men's subjective understanding of their public sex and how these understandings were shaped were important to this project. By providing the men with the mental space to go back and forth during the interviews, challenging their understandings and my thinking, we worked together to produce this project.

My data collection produced many challenges, some that were anticipated and others that were not. I expected to, and did, have difficulties recruiting men. Even though I knew several men who often spoke openly about their public sex, I did not anticipate just how difficult it would be. I thought once these men were involved with my study, they would encourage their friends to work with me. Although this was the case, their friends, tricks, and acquaintances were not always comfortable

talking with me on the record about their public sex. Several of these men talked casually with me about this project and their use of public sex sites, but did not become part of the interview study. Some of the men were not comfortable talking about their public sex in a formal way, and others had partners who they feared would become suspicious, since both men in the couple knew about my study.

After several months of not being able to recruit participants, I decided to solicit from a study involving over 400 gay and bisexual men in the region that involved interviews dealing with the participant's sexual history. I was told by one of the researchers that many of the men used PSEs, and I was invited to recruit study participants anonymously through the interviewers. Only one man called me for an interview. After several more months, I created a screen name (SexNPublic) and profile and went into online chat rooms that men used for companionship and online banter, but mostly, for sexual hook-ups. Initially, I was overwhelmed by the response. I returned each instant message and email and waited for the men to call, email, or instant message me the next time I was online. Once again, the majority of men did not contact me again, or after the second contact informed me they were not interested in being interviewed by me about their public sex, but did enjoy talking with me about the study.

Most of the online men were interested in having sex, while others found the topic fascinating but were uncomfortable being taped talking about their public sex. Although I stressed that their anonymity would never be threatened, they were unwilling to meet me and be interviewed. Also, most of the men were interested in whether I was a gay man myself. They seemed suspicious of straight men wanting

them to discuss their public sex. Gay men's sexuality continues to be treated with suspicion, especially when it challenges the heteronormative ideal of the committed monogamous couple at home. I believe these men who have felt under attack for their cyber sex hook-ups from community health departments did not want to deal with their public sex being similarly treated.

Another challenge during data collection was building trust and a good rapport with the men. I did this by disclosing my "complete member" status. My sampling method, snowball sampling and word of mouth provided many men with confidence that I was someone who could be trusted. Many of the men were referred by someone who knew me or had already been interviewed and came to the interview with some sense of my integrity and desire to get their story right.

While I purposefully did not focus on men who had been arrested, a few of the interviewees had been arrested over the years. I asked them to tell me about their arrest history or the arrest history of someone they knew. This created another challenge for me. A few of the men told stories about friends who had recently been arrested and were in the middle of dealing with the charges. As we talked about the arrest and the impending process, I was frustrated to discover that many of the men were unsure of the formal charge against them and did not want to hire an attorney to help them with the courts. The men were being told by police officers that their best bet was to plead guilty and pay the fine. This way, the men were told, the publicity surrounding their arrest and the financial costs would be minimized. Because of the "action orientation" (Fonow and Cook 1991) that informed my project I discussed with the men the possible consequences of a guilty plea and offered names of local

attorneys who would help them fight the charges or plea-bargain on their behalf. I felt a sense of responsibility and gratitude toward the men and wanted to “pay them back” for volunteering to be part of the study. I was enacting my own sense of caring for the men I met who used public sex sites. I wanted the men to walk away from the interview having some useful information that would help them make informed decisions that might affect the rest of their lives. However, no participant asked for the names of local attorneys.

While writing my auto-ethnography, I was concerned about providing information that would facilitate the reader’s understanding of the process I went through working on this project and not writing a self-serving narrative that did not benefit the project (Reed-Danahay 1999). My auto-ethnography involved my use of self-observations as part of the situation studied. I engaged in a study of my own people (Hayano 1979) and not a study of my own self (Ellis 1991). In my auto-ethnography, I wanted to articulate the need for a discussion about the researcher’s “erotic subjectivity” to reveal the heteronormative assumptions of research protocol, while providing enough information that would illuminate my point and not taint the research. Also, I was concerned with my own cultural and historical environment and how my understanding of the phenomenon might limit my perspective (Nash and Wintrob 1972; Sangren 1988). Finally, the challenge that seemed to have the most influence over my project was sexuality. Sexuality, or more accurately, our society’s discomfort with sexuality, influenced my research design, data collection, and writing. The impact of sexuality on my project was noted throughout my study and, thus, merits a separate section to address concerns that were raised.

SEXUALITY AND RESEARCH

Recently, the role of sexual identity (Lewin and Leap 1996) and erotic subjectivity (Kulick and Willson 1995) has received attention by anthropologists. While these anthologies have dealt with anthropologists specifically, they provide insight for all researchers doing fieldwork. Lewin and Leap's anthology deals with the concerns of gay and lesbian anthropologists; who must deal with the issue of "passing" in their careers, because their identity may deny them funding, career opportunities, get them ejected from the field, or deny them access to a population. Kulick and Willson's anthology deals with the broader issues of what they call the anthropologist's erotic subjectivity.

Kulick and Willson (1995) use the term "erotic subjectivity" in order to reduce the cultural meanings that are already associated with sex. The editors, "have given [the authors] free reign to discuss any aspect of their fieldwork that they consider to be relevant to the topic; hence, the purposely nebulous 'erotic subjectivity' of the volume's subtitle" (8). The purpose of the anthology is to "provoke debate and [reinvigorate] discussion about power, privilege and perspective in anthropological fieldwork and writing" (xv). Newton (1993) suggests that when sexuality is treated as a nonsubject, heterosexual-male subjectivity remains beyond the scope of critical inquiry and its privileged status remains stable. Also, by maintaining sexuality's invisibility, women and gay men for whom sexuality and gender are often problematic are silenced. Kulick (1995) extends Newton's ideas in his assertion that silences about the erotic subjectivity of fieldworkers conceal "the deeply racist and colonialist conditions that make possible our continuing

unidirectional discourse about the sexuality of the people we study" (4).

Ethnographers who ignore the "erotic" of their field experiences miss an opportunity to critically investigate how their training, fieldwork, observations, and reporting are implicated in the racist, sexist, colonialist, and heterosexist assumptions of field research.

"Sex is a domain that is perhaps uniquely overdetermined in Western societies" (Kulick 1995, 5). Kulick argues for the realization that the erotic subjectivity of the field researcher is useful by provoking the researcher to inquire about the "validity and meaning of the self-other dichotomy, and about the hierarchies on which anthropological work often seems to depend" (5). For him, these are questions about exploitation, racism, commitment, and the politics of desire. These questions require that ethnographers acknowledge and critique their methodological and theoretical foundations. And, as queer scholars pose new questions and produce new knowledges, new methodologies may be realized. Anthropologists seem to be leading the debates about the impact of sexual identity, desire, and activity on fieldwork and how the "silences" surrounding sexuality in the field among scholars influence the questions asked, methodologies used, and what is considered "knowledge." Kulick states, "by *a priori* defining sex as out of bounds for fieldworkers, anthropologists have engineered a silence; a kind of meaningful silence that could be analyzed in a Foucauldian spirit as constituting an integral part of the strategies that undergird anthropological claims to authority" (12, emphasis in the original). In this sense, ethnographers' claims to authority are supported as long as sexuality remains beyond critical inquiry, silenced. So, research that remains silent

about sexuality maintains the racist and colonialist principles that support the ethnographic enterprise.

The writers in both anthologies, by investigating how their sexual identities and experiences have affected their research topic, the knowledge sought, and the methodology employed, challenge institutional power structures that relegate sexual identity and erotic subjectivity beyond the scope of critical methodological inquiry. As scholars debate the importance of reflexivity in ethnography and how knowledge is produced, it is necessary for all ethnographers to understand what assumptions support our methodologies. This project posed new questions about gay and bisexual men's public sex and also attempted to use new methodologies. In Chapter One, I presented those new questions that would be asked about public sex. In this section, I address my sexual engagement with participants and how that affected the research process and what I considered for the written report of this study.

By not separating my personal self from my researcher self, I am able to use all of my senses in the field. Altork (1995) describes the benefits she realized when she allowed her heart and mind to work together during her fieldwork at a fire camp in Idaho. She acknowledged the highly sensual and erotic aspects of fire camps and incorporated her emotional and physical responses with her intellectual responses in her interpretations as she observed and interviewed the camp's inhabitants. She compares separating the intellectual from the emotional (sensual) during fieldwork as similar to the mind-body split of Western medicine. Emotional, as well as physical knowledge is regarded as antithetical to rational thought. The separation of other

senses from intellect maintains the hierarchical evaluation of knowledges produced by traditional scholars marked as "other."

Like Altork (1995), I do not fragment myself. I consider the experiences of my sensual self as knowledge that is as valuable as knowledge from intellectual self. In this way, I am involved in the research by engaging with the participants as a scholar but also a gay man, a potential friend, trick, or lover. I believe my complete participation during the interviews revealed to the men that my commitment to their experiences could be believed and trusted. Also, I am fully aware that this study would not have existed if it were not for my subjective experience of public sex and the critique of the academic literature that followed. My personal experiences revealed the research opportunity. The questions I asked and the means by which I attempted to ask them were part of my personal world, not that of the text books and course work that trained my young ethnographic mind. Had I relied on legitimated theories and methodologies, this research would not exist in this form. So, too, had the university's review board allowed my originally proposed study, a participant observation, this project may have produced quite different findings. When the review board denied that aspect of my research, they, in effect, dictated my research methodology.

Sexual relationships can be epistemologically illuminating and can be methodologically useful (Bolton 1995; Kulick 1995). Sexual behavior is difficult to observe and is rarely discussed explicitly. As Bolton states, "I learned more through participation than by simple observation or direct interviewing" (148). I approached this study similarly. My sexual history with several of the participants produced an

intimacy between us that facilitated a stronger connection than would have otherwise existed. The interviews with the men with whom I had been sexual started more quickly than those with the men with whom I had not been sexual because the former felt more comfortable with me. We shared a history that facilitated a greater sense of camaraderie and trust during the interviews.

Bolton (1995) discusses the ethics of using information gathered during sexual encounters as anthropological data, arguing that such methodology is not inherently unethical. Bolton's research, much like mine, greatly overlaps with his social world and he is able to study the "at hand" knowledge of his everyday world. Bolton's research deals with gay men's sexual practices since the emergence of AIDS. He considers his scholarship activism because of his clear aim to help reduce new HIV infections among gay men. Bolton's research has the potential to save lives. In fact, it would be *unethical* for Bolton not to obtain the most accurate data simply out of deference to political considerations that deem sexual engagement with participants inherently unacceptable methodology.

Dubisch (1995) extends the idea that having sex with someone in the field is not necessarily unethical. She states that while engaged in fieldwork, researchers share almost every other aspect of their participants' lives -- so why treat sex as a special case? Rubin (1984) argues that contemporary U.S. society treats sex with a "fallacy of misplaced scale." While sex is another socially informed human behavior, it is always a special case. It is treated as if it has more significance, more importance, and more consequences than other social behaviors. Dubisch discusses the exploitative nature of fieldwork and asks: "could a sexual relationship be any

more intimate, committing, or exploitive than our normal relations with the 'native'?" (31).

Goode (1998) asks the same question about "sex with informants." He ponders whether or not discussing sex with participants would reveal the "fiction of objectivity" for the social sciences. He asks whether or not the "veil of secrecy" that shrouds sexuality in social science research might serve to preserve "the secret of research intersubjectivity" (320). The sex secret in ethnographic research serves to maintain existing hierarchies that support the colonialist practices of science as usual (Kulick and Willson 1995). The sex secret relegates any mention of researchers' sexuality to self-serving egotism and displays of poor research standards. However, this has not kept ethnographers from exploring the ways that sexuality functions within social science research, for better or for worse.

Ethnographers seek to blend into the population they are observing in order to understand their subjective world and better report the "natives'" meanings. Had I engaged in participant observation during the course of this study I would have drawn suspicion from other users by not engaging in sexual activities. So, to blend in, I would have needed to be sexual, which is contrary to what ethnography students are taught. Traditional ethnography considers sex in the field a reason for being rejected from the field, but when the field is sexually charged or the knowledge sought is sexual, the opposite, not being sexual, could cause ejection from the field. Sexual engagement provides ethnographers one more means to gather information and observe the realities of the participants. By relying on assumptions that sexual engagement is inherently bad, traditional ethnographers deny the possibility for new

methodologies to emerge. Also, by relying on institutional review boards to approve research designs, ethnographers may become complicit with elite discourses that define and circumscribe science and the production of knowledge.

I had slept with or dated ten of the 30 men before interviewing them. While nine of these “dates” had occurred several years earlier prior to the study, the most recent one happened two nights before the interview. In fact, my relationships with those nine men were some of the experiences that informed my research questions. I will discuss the most recent “date” with an interview participant, since we maintained our anonymity during our tryst. My experience with D. B. (a freelance writer in his late forties) provides an example of how sexual history can help to minimize the inequality between the researcher and participants.

I first met D.B. online. We chatted with each other in a chat room and decided to meet. We exchanged phone numbers and I realized that his phone number was the phone number of the next participant for my study. I went over and during our sex play I teased him about how small our neighborhood was. He asked what I meant and I told him he would know soon enough. Our date was fun, relaxed, and daring; an anonymous, emotionally rewarding experience. The evening of our interview he answered the door, smiled, and blushed. I jokingly asked if he remembered me and then asked if he wanted to cancel the interview. He chuckled, agreed that the neighborhood was small, emphasized he really wanted to do the interview, and hugged me. D. B. told me that he had been nervous anticipating the interview and concerned about the interviewer’s motives. He said knowing that it was me he felt much more comfortable because I was “one of the club.” He assumed

that since our sexual tastes were similar, our political stances would be similar, as well. Regardless of whether or not this was true, it put D. B. at ease during our interview, perhaps allowing him to answer my questions with more honesty.

The relationships that have evolved out of these interviews remind me of the relationships that have evolved out of my “anonymous” public sex. I know very little about most of my participants, but continue to run into many at bars, movies, functions, and in the neighborhood. Each one of these interactions mirrors my interactions with the men I meet while cruising a public sex site. After assessing that it is safe to say hello, we smile at each other, catch each other up on our lives, and then ask each other “what’s new?” These anonymous relationships reflect how these men care about me and about building a community of friends that parallels the caring that occurs in anonymous interactions at a public sex site.

By asking for a more nuanced understanding of sexuality in fieldwork, the authors in Kulick and Willson’s anthology are not denying how sexuality has been “used to thwart understanding, quash challenge, and fortify hierarchies of gender, class, and race” (23). Moreno’s (1995) discussion of her rape by her male research assistant while in the field clearly demonstrates the ways sexuality is used in such a manner. What the authors are calling for is a discussion that treats sexuality and erotic subjectivity as relations of power that influence ethnography. In this sense, I think sexuality and erotic subjectivity influence all social science research from the conception of the thesis to how the report is written. Sexuality will remain outside the realm of social inquiry as long as it continues to be viewed as natural and pre-social.

As a queer graduate student, the decision to discuss the impact of my 'erotic subjectivity' in this report has been a difficult one. Many readers will simply be turned off by the amount of reflexivity I have included in this report. As Bolton (1995) states, "to reveal how we know what we know, anthropologists working with sexuality may have to disclose more about ourselves than is customary" (157). Qualitative sociologists remain conflicted about the purpose of reflexivity in written reports and politically charged research agendas, let alone research on gay male sexuality. The possible negative consequences for my career are innumerable. As the authors in Lewin and Leap's (1996) anthology have demonstrated, there is the risk that I may lose job opportunities, funding dollars, promotions, publishing opportunities, and legitimacy. Queer scholars are left to wonder whether the rejection of a grant or promotion is due to their capabilities or due to larger cultural constraints that attempt to silence their work. Ultimately, there will be no change without individuals challenging the institutional powers that determine what questions can be asked by which methods and for what purpose. By ignoring the political aspect of research, scholars reproduce existing paradigms and constrict the opportunities for new knowledge to be produced that can alter contemporary thinking about the social world. Queer scholarship, like scholarship for women, people of color, and non-Westerners has demonstrated before, seeks to reveal the historical and political aspects of social phenomena – the homosexual/heterosexual binary and the overarching sex-negative assumptions – that have previously been treated as natural.

CHAPTER 3

THE PERSONAL SIDE OF PUBLIC SEX

Scholars in the social sciences and humanities have rarely addressed the social aspect of public sex cruising. Those who commented on the socializing that occurs in public sex sites also addressed the need for more research that examines how anonymous or impersonal sex is more than a sexual exchange (Levine 1998; Clatts 1998; Diehl 2000). As Diehl states, “although *Tearoom Trade* has served as a springboard for a number of other critical ventures exploring (homo)sexual practices in public places, not one of these projects has problematized Humphreys’s basic premise (that is, tearoom trade is impersonal)” (107). In this chapter, I problematize the premise that sex in public spaces is impersonal. While Humphreys’s conclusions are drawn from tearooms -- public restrooms -- mine are drawn from interviews with men who have used multiple sites, not just tearooms. First, I discuss how public sex has been theorized to warrant an investigation into the personal aspect of “impersonal sex.” Second, I articulate the characteristics of public sex sites, or public sex environments (PSEs), distinguishing between sex in public and sex in PSEs, and why men use PSEs. Third, I discuss three ways men socialize during anonymous sexual encounters in PSEs.

THEORIZING PUBLIC SEX

Historians have examined how men searching public spaces for sex with other men facilitated the emergence of gay male identities and communities prior to the Stonewall Riots (Chauncey 1994; Bérubé, 1996). Chauncey challenges the idea that the homosexual identity was imposed upon docile bodies. He examines the role of

bars, public baths, beaches, public restrooms, streets, and neighborhoods in facilitating an emerging “gay” subject. He reveals how the emerging gay male relied on and challenged the medicalized definition of the homosexual. Chauncey argues that ordinary homosexual men resisted medical labels and created more nuanced identities and communities. Bérubé explores how the emerging gay male used public bathhouses to create a private space to cruise, socialize, and ultimately build community. Ultimately, gay men’s visibility and permanence were able to support public bathhouses that were established exclusively for gay men. Both authors argue that these public cruising sites were essential in the early development of gay male identities and communities.

More recently, Levine (1998) explores the emerging gay identity of the “gay clone.” For Levine, the clone represents a specific historical moment in gay men’s communities. The clone is a self-consciously masculine man, almost always white, of the contemporary urban gay ghetto with specific dress codes, socializing patterns, friendships, and sexual proclivities. These men dress alike and socialize almost exclusively with each other, thus the clone reference. According to Levine, clones’ primary sexual experiences are with the men they meet while looking for sex in “cruisy” gathering places. These cruisy sites rarely extend beyond the clone’s narrow social circuit. Levine situates the clone in a specific historic moment that occurs due to shifting experiences of stigma for gay men due to gay liberation, the growing gay rights movements, and their masculine enculturation.

Berlant and Warner (1998) state that many of the queer neighborhoods and commercial districts existing today are a result of those sites originally providing an

opportunity for male-male sexual cruising. The authors state, “Not all of the thousands who migrate or make pilgrimages to Christopher Street use the porn shops, but all benefit from the fact that some do” and after awhile “a critical mass develops” (562). The authors critique the implementation, by former New York Mayor Giuliani, of zoning laws aimed at eliminating the porn shops because of their affect on queer world making. They argue the businesses of queer neighborhoods rely on the adult businesses’ customers and the sexual cruising. The new zoning laws would limit the number of sexually oriented businesses and thus negatively affect the bookstores, bars, restaurants, and novelty shops. The loss of customers who were also seeking sexually explicit material or cruising for sex would be a loss of customers for the other businesses. Berlant and Warner declare that by extinguishing public sex cultures, “almost all *out* gay or queer culture would wither on the vine” (563, emphasis in the original). They argue that even lesbian cultures are stronger because of their ties to places that draw a predominant male base like Dupont Circle in Washington D.C. So, by closing male public sex venues, lesbian communities would be impacted, as well. For the authors, all gay and lesbian sex is public sex. Gays and lesbians have no right to privacy afforded heterosexuals by the U.S. Supreme Court, so every act of same-sex sex is enacted without privacy.

While not exactly forgotten, PSEs have recently received more national attention. PSEs re-emerged in the national consciousness when HIV/AIDS appeared and dramatically altered the sexual, political, and medical landscape. The debates about closing bathhouses and popular cruising spots were renewed in the late 80s, as health departments required the closure of many sites where men met for cruising and

sexual expression. These closings drew criticism from queer activists (Bérubé 1996; Colter 1996). Activists argued that these settings could be used as sites to distribute information and supplies. Also, by closing down these sites, the men would only move to new locations, thus complicating the tasks of outreach workers. Closing these sites would have little impact on stopping the spread of HIV and other STIs. Also, queer organizing had prompted a political and cultural backlash against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual individuals (Duggan 1994). Recently, it was the arrest and subsequent “outing” of singer George Michael in April, 1998, that reminded the nation about the presence of male sexual activity in parks (Galvin 1998; Gideonse 1998; Wieder 1999; Woog 1999). Most contemporary public discussions about men and PSEs continue to demonize the men who use them, even in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual communities. In the Advocate, a mainstream gay and lesbian news magazine, one can hear the echo of mainstream public sentiments in articles and readers’ letters suggesting that these men are self-destructive, predatory, threats to public health, and embarrassments to the LGBT community (Diehl 2000; Woog 1999). Currently, PSEs are simultaneously viewed as historical locales where community and identity once developed and as sites of contagion for disease and illness. Both models leave the social aspect of public sex among men, today, unexamined.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC SEX ENVIRONMENTS

Most participants in the present study were familiar with the term public sex environment or PSE, for a few however, this was a new term. Even though they had not heard the term before, they understood the concept of cruising for sex in a public

setting. Several stated a distinction between sex in a PSE – this paper’s area of interest – and sex in public. For the purpose of this research, public sex was limited to known cruising sites where counter-cultural norms have emerged that influenced participants’ behavior and thinking about public sex. I was interested in the experience of men who used PSEs, not necessarily of men who had sex in public.

Since I did not recruit from the field, I wanted to make sure that the participants and I were talking about the same types of settings. I also wanted to understand how the participants defined PSEs. I had noticed, during earlier nonsystematic fieldwork, that the men used more than just one setting. I was interested in how the men recognized different types of PSEs such as a tearoom or a cruisy park. While each type of a PSE has its own culture and norms, I wanted to know what PSEs, in general, had in common. Also, I was interested in what the participants perceived to be their public sex experiences. For instance, two men have used the same venue, a bathhouse for example, yet create different meanings since they viewed the sex in that venue differently. This distinction became evident during the interviews as different men used the same site but not all considered that site a public sex setting.

While there was not agreement on every type of public sex setting, there was general consensus on PSEs’ characteristics. However, several men, when asked to define a public sex environment, discussed the difference between a “truly public” site and other public sex settings. I do not attempt to establish the definitive answer about what constitutes a public sex environment, partly because the men’s definitions of what was a PSE were inconsistent, revealing the ambiguity between the public and

the private (Leap 1990). As queer people have learned and as I have stated earlier, privacy laws protect individuals not places. In Bowers v. Hardwick (1986), the U. S. Supreme Court denied gays and lesbians their right to privacy, in effect making all gay and lesbian sex public sex.

Additionally, due to the private and sensitive nature of the topic, I was concerned that by defining public sex or a PSE, it could potentially have limiting affects on my sampling. I chose instead to let the men provide their own definitions of public sex locales. All the men listed the same three or four types of PSEs even though their definitions varied. Miles (51 and a white lawyer) who was unable to give me a definition, still listed the most common PSEs mentioned during the interview: highway rest areas, public restrooms, and parks. Then, when I asked him where he looked for sex, he provided a few more examples: locker rooms, saunas, and adult bookstores. While Miles was unfamiliar with the term “public sex environment,” he provided a list similar to those the other participants had offered.

The participants’ definitions varied from being broad to specific. James (47 and a white artist and masseur) gave one of the broadest definitions. He said, “Sex outside the home basically is what it means to me,” when I asked him to define a public sex environment. However, his list was very similar to the lists the others provided. Robert (37 and a Hispanic accountant) described PSEs to me this way:

... Anywhere where you could have sex in public. But that’s limited to a place where there’s somewhat privacy, somewhere, a room where you could get caught, but it’s not directly out in the open, [like] in the middle of a shopping center or something.

So while the definitions varied among the group, their lists tended to provide variations on a theme, such as a public restroom at a shopping mall as opposed to a public restroom on a college campus.

There were five characteristics that continually appeared in the definitions of PSEs that participants provided. First, the public has the ability to use the space. Second, the original purpose of the site was not sexual activity. Third, other men knew that the site was a place to cruise for sex. Fourth, the men involved were able to create some sense of privacy, as Robert stated earlier. Fifth, the setting was free. While the participants did not agree on all five characteristics, the contested characteristics were the ones used to delineate the difference between a public sex site and a "truly public" sex setting. Several of the men believed that if a site was not free it was not truly public. Other men believed that if the site was a business that catered to clients' sexual needs it was not "truly public," as well. As I will discuss later, the second and fifth characteristics were the ones most often contested.

John (a 37-year-old Italian-American communications technician) discussed this common distinction during our interview. He said,

I mean there are the true public sex areas like parks, rest areas, [and] that kind of thing that are truly open to the entire public; anybody could come wandering through for whatever their reasons might be. And, gay men tend to congregate to have sex on top of that. There are also places like bathhouses, bookstores, adult movie centers where people go for the obvious intention of sex, but obviously it's not your home. So do I consider that public? Not really.

He also talked about this distinction in regards to his sense of safety. Once, five guys beat him while he was cruising a wooded park. He said, "Because actually when I found the bookstore, adult video thing, bathhouses, I stopped going to the truly public areas because it was much less dangerous for me in terms of getting arrested or

beaten up again.” John stopped going to truly public areas, but he and his partner continue to use the baths (gay bathhouses). He considered the baths and bookstores “as gay identified spaces or sexually identified spaces” and therefore not a public sex site. While being beaten when cruising for sex was rarely brought up as a concern, the threat of police arrest was mentioned in every interview. John’s discussion dealt with several characteristics of PSEs and this was typical of the participants’ definitions. No one discussed all five explicitly, most used two or three characteristics in their definitions and implied the other characteristics in their lists of sites.

The first PSE characteristic was “generally where it is public, which means anybody can walk in there” as George put it. Women and men could walk into a PSE, single-sex public restrooms being the exception. While gendered expectations might restrict some women from entering an adult bookstore, they are capable of entering such an establishment. In this sense, public sex becomes also an expression of male privilege. While not every man is afforded the same access to all public sites, men’s access to public spaces is seldom restricted. However, women’s access to the public sphere remains uneven when compared to men’s access, even for queer men and women (Rothenberg 1995; Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter 1997; Bouthillette 1997).

Second, the locale was not originally intended for sex. For most of the participants an adult bookstore or bathhouse was not a PSE because the purpose of the establishment was sexual activity or to obtain sexual paraphernalia. So, for the majority of the group, a public sex environment was a place where one would have

access to the setting for reasons other than sex. However, for eight of the guys interviewed this distinction did not exist. As James (a 25-year-old student) said, "I would define a PSE as anyplace where men come together ...to have sex in a public environment or in a semi-public environment on a regular basis." For James, and the other seven guys, the threat of arrest and the casual attitude toward sex permitted them to view bookstores and bathhouses as public sex environments. This was one way that the men differentiated a public sex site from a "truly public" one.

Third, a high expectation of finding a sex partner and/or engaging in sex at a particular location is another common characteristic of a PSE. Mark (a 54-year-old, Jewish insurance salesman) stated this most clearly when he said, "it was assumed by most that nobody else would be there except gay men who were interested [in sex]." Mark (who rarely uses PSEs these days) would only go where he thought, "there's some acceptance or tolerance for the sexual activity" by the owners or management, thus where there would be other men cruising for sex, as well. All the men either clearly stated this or implied this characteristic when they listed the PSEs they knew about or had used. The most common reasons mentioned for the participants' to frequent their favorite PSEs were that the sites always provided a sexual partner and efficiency. The men favored sites where they could find a willing partner quickly and easily, have sex, and then leave. What was implied in this description was the men's ability to create a sense of privacy; the privacy allowed the men to hide their activity from outsiders and the police. Almost every man discussed his concern about offending an outsider and the threat of arrest.

Fourth, the men believed that they were able to create privacy within the setting. Leap finds similar understandings among the men he interviewed who cruised “the sauna and associated areas in the men’s locker room of an ‘(officially) heterosexual’ health club and the backroom of a ‘gay’-oriented, adult bookstore” (1999, 116). Leap states that the distinction between public and private remains blurred. Privacy is not an inherent characteristic of any site, but is negotiated through who are the participants in the site and how they use the site. Similarly, all of the participants repeatedly stated that they were able to create some privacy while in a public setting.

Fifth, a public sex environment was free. All the men defined a PSE as such, but twelve of the men considered businesses where you had to pay a fee to enter a public sex environment, as well. Tyler, who worked as a sexual health educator for men who have sex with men (MSMs), was 28, and of Mexican and Caucasian descent, said, “The public sex environment is a place where usually it’s free and there’s sex going on.” He conceptualized the distinction in this way: “a bathhouse to me, the public has access to it, but there’s no danger, there’s no risk of someone coming in and arresting you because you’re doing something illegal.” Tyler’s comment reflected many bathhouse patrons’ sentiments that if they pay there is a level of safety from arrest, and therefore, the meanings attached to sex in a bathhouse were different than those meanings attached to sex in a PSE. I would argue that this may be a false sense of security.

Bérubé (1996) discusses police raids on bathhouses that occurred as recent as the eighties. Two participants from my study discussed adult-bookstore ar

and theaters that used hidden cameras in cooperation with the local police. Several of the men talked about more recent raids in adult bookstores, but also in city parks and public restrooms. One of the men, whose partner managed a gay bathhouse, discussed the local health department's involvement in raiding adult bookstores, as well. For these men, the potential threat of a police raid on the establishment maintained its status as a public sex setting, regardless of whether one had to pay to enter.

The distinction between having sex in public versus using a PSE for sex was clarified during several interviews. Pierce (a 51-year-old human resource manager for a department store who identified as Caucasian) discussed this distinction during our interview. He and his partner frequently went camping in the nearby mountains. They enjoyed hiking the isolated trails and having sex in nature. They did not go hiking looking for sex because there was no one else on the trails. They enjoyed the solitude and natural setting for a sexual tryst. But when they were back at home, they frequented a park that was predominantly used by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual communities and is known as a cruising site. Pierce and Blake, his partner, also used the park to recruit models for their gay male adult video company. For both men, their mountain sex was sex in public - not public sex.

All of the men mentioned tearooms, public restrooms, and public parks as known PSEs. The full list of all PSEs identified during the interviews included tearooms (whether at a highway rest stop or in a mall, store, airport, bus station, public park, or college campus), parks, truck stops, gymnasium locker rooms and saunas, saunas in hotels, traditional bathhouses, streets surrounding a PSE, specific

streets in gay neighborhoods, alleys next to gay bars, and backrooms in gay bars. David (a 35-year-old, white architect) and James (the artist, previously mentioned) had the broadest definitions of a PSE. David also had the lengthiest list. His definition was “anyplace where another individual could walk in upon you or see you doing something of a sexual nature if that was not their original intent.” For David, this included his apartment. He lived in a gay neighborhood and his street-level apartment was close to a park where men cruised for sex. He would leave his blinds up and work around his apartment naked. Men would walk by, notice him naked, and tap on the window. David would invite them in and have sex. This was one of the most frequent ways David met sex partners. Since David’s apartment was near a cruisy park and the sidewalk was sometimes cruisy, he considered his apartment a PSE. This challenges typical thinking about public sex, but as Berlant and Warner (1998) remind us, queer people’s sexuality does not exist within a “zone of privacy” but always in a counterpublic: not private, but not public.

One time, before I had started interviewing, a friend showed me an apartment in which a man frequently walked around naked. Friends of his had slept with this man by just tapping on his window. We walked to the apartment, but the man was not home. Well, as luck would have it, I met David at a party thrown by two men who I had interviewed. They informed me that David was a friend of theirs from a tearoom downtown. The hosts brought up the topic of my dissertation. David mentioned how much he had sex in the park and volunteered to be interviewed. During our interview, he told me about his nudism, where he lived, and how he considered his apartment a PSE. I chuckled thinking to myself, “Anonymity? What

anonymity?" I had put the pieces of the puzzle together and told him about the tour to his apartment I had taken months earlier.

Characteristics of favorite PSEs

From previous, nonsystematic fieldwork during my public sex outreach job, I noticed that most of the men I saw in public sex settings also cruised other sites, as well. So, I asked the participants which PSEs they used and which ones they used most often. While most of the guys had used many different types of PSEs from tearooms to parks, to bookstores, to locker rooms, to rest areas, every man had one or two PSEs that they preferred. Every man interviewed offered the same two reasons for what made a PSE their favorite: convenience and guaranteed sex. When I asked Robert (a 29-year-old salesman) why he frequented tearooms more than other PSEs, he responded:

Their convenience and it's, they're a sure thing. I'm not looking for a specific type of person per se. It's just they're in and out and they're cruisy most of the time. They're very predictable in that sense.

Alex (a 22-year-old student and outreach worker to queer youth of color) added,

I like my own peer group and the guys there tend to be, not all, but ...I have a good shot at meeting somebody my own age...And I like that. I like having sex with my own peer group.

While not every interviewee mentioned their attraction to the men at the specific locale, it was implied during the interviews. Only Mannington, a 35-year-old white florist, commented about having sex with any man that wanted to have sex with him. I learned this after the interview when he asked about what type of guy interested me. During this talk he told me that he would have sex with anyone because he had been extremely heavy as a child and remembered the emotions he felt by being rejected.

He did not want to make anyone else feel that way, so he had sex with anyone who wanted to have sex with him. Mannington thought this was a way to build a sense of camaraderie with others in the setting. Accordingly, he sometimes viewed his public sex as emotionally healing work.

These favorite sites were almost always the same type of PSE that the men first used when they started going to PSEs. So, if someone started by using bookstores, they favored bookstores as their favorite type of site. None of the participants discussed this as a reason for their favorite PSE, but they typically used the one that was close to home or work because of its convenient location. My earlier notes from nonsystematic fieldwork and unidentified interviews suggested reasons why this was the case. First, there was a sense of safety using the same type of PSEs. Nearly every man with whom I have discussed their public sex activity has mentioned the fact that they do not want to attract attention and the need to be in control while in the setting. Attracting unwanted attention was a primary concern that the men I interviewed experienced, as well.

Also, the men talked about feeling comfortable in a site. One of the ways they were able to feel comfortable was by knowing the norms of a particular setting. Usually, what worked for one bookstore worked in other bookstores, and so on. This allowed them to feel in control and able to keep their activities hidden from “outsiders.” Dusty (a 31-year-old, facilities manager for a medical products development firm) said, “The thing for bathrooms for me, I can go to any city in a Western nation and I know the protocol.” Dusty’s comments were echoed by other participants during our interviews. By knowing what to do in the setting the

participants felt confident they could keep the activity secret from outsiders, and they would be able to sense when something was wrong. Dusty felt he had a sixth sense, "In a weird way there's a sixth sense. You know when something is not right." While Dusty labeled it a "sixth sense," most of the men discussed the cues they looked for in a setting to get a sense if everything was all right. The men's ability to recognize the signs of cruising activity at a particular site allowed them to find other public sex sites when they were traveling or just happened to stumble upon one. For example, while on a trip one would be able to use the bathroom at the mall or in a hotel and look for signs of sexual activity, such as graffiti, glory holes, or men lingering.

THE SOCIAL ASPECTS OF PUBLIC SEX

The social aspect of anonymous sex has received very little attention in studies of gay male life and public sex. Only recently have studies explored public sex among men without pathologizing or demonizing the men or the settings. Levine's (1998) ethnography of "gay clones" extensively details their world and how they organize their friendships, partying, relationships, and sexual cruising. According to Levine, clones are the preeminent image of the urban gay male subculture during the seventies and early eighties. Levine uncovers several types of sociosexual relationships among the clones of New York City. The most common and important of these are friendships. Another type is based primarily on sexual contact. Levine describes the two types common to these sociosexual relationships as "tricks and fuck buddies." Clones use the term "trick" to refer to a man with whom they have an impersonal sexual encounter with or as a verb that indicates such

behavior. "Fuck buddies" are men with whom clones have sex on an ongoing basis, but with whom they seldom have any other social contact, such as dinner or a movie. Romantic relationships are the rarest among clones, so most of their sexual contacts are with tricks and fuck buddies.

Levine (1998) is critical of previous research (Hoffman 1968; Karlen 1971; Humphreys 1970; Saghir and Robins 1973; Bell and Weinberg 1978) on gay men that treated tricking as only a sexual exchange. His research supports the work of others that describe tricking in ways that reveal its ability to provide companionship, affection, and support for the participants (Tripp 1975; Jay and Young 1977; Altman 1982). As Levine notes, tricking "also carried the possibility of romantic relationships" (103) for the men in his ethnography. Today, tricking is a common term among gay men. It is no longer associated with a certain type of gay man, but still reflects a casual sexual encounter, regardless of how or where the interaction occurred.

Among clones, tricking often occurred in the bars, clubs, baths, and on the streets where they lived and socialized -- the cruisy spots. The impersonal and casual aspects of tricking were similar to the impersonal and casual aspects of sex in public sex environments. Moreover, several of the men in this study listed similar settings that clones used for tricking. While the men in Levine's study did not discuss their sexual cruising in terms of the public-private split, the commonalities between the sexual cruising of clones and gay men using public sex sites twenty years later suggests these were similar social phenomenon in their organization and shared reasons for cruising. Levine (1998) provides a thorough description of how clones

cruised each other in public settings that reflect similar patterns of contact, negotiation, rejection, and acceptance among men in public sex environments. In his descriptions of cruising, Levine uses examples of public sex cruising, such as a clone cruising on a street in his neighborhood. These descriptions overlap with most gay men's cruising for tricks with only minor alterations due to the specific locale and the desired attributes of the potential trick. For example, some PSEs did not allow much talking and required communication in nonverbal ways such as in public restrooms, while others, such as a park, allowed more conversation among users.

Diehl (2000) declares the need for sociological work that problematizes Humphreys's assumption that tearoom trade was just "impersonal sex." While Levine's research focuses on a small, but highly visible, segment of urban gay men's communities, the data from my research support the idea that impersonal sex is more than a sexual exchange. The ability to socialize was not unique to one setting or another. However, parks and bathhouses were the two most often cited settings for socializing by the men in this study. Parks and bathhouses' physical layouts were better suited for conversation and the norms of each allowed for more conversation than other locales. The architecture of a space influenced the behavioral norms of the given public sex locale, as well. For example, a bathroom near a lobby where men could watch the traffic in and out of the bathroom allowed for some conversation among the men waiting in the lobby. A bathroom that was not near a lobby area did not facilitate men gathering outside without attracting unwanted attention and limited conversation among the bathroom patrons.

The men socialized in these spaces with the men they tricked with and the other men in the setting. The participants socialized with their tricks in two different ways. The most common way that the participants talked with their tricks was talking with them after sex. The other way was talking with their tricks while they were going to another site, regardless of whether the new site would be another public setting or a private place. Another way that men socialized in public sex settings was during the "down times," or periods of low traffic. Last, friendships developed while talking with tricks or during the down time. For several of the participants, these friendships were the reasons for going to a public sex locale, sex was secondary.

Talking with the Trick

The most common form of socializing while cruising for sex in a PSE was talking with a trick. The participants talked with their tricks either after sex or during a car ride or walk to some place else. Even the men who used PSEs just for sex usually talked with the men if they went to a different place, either a private home or another site; thus every participant had talked with a trick. Robert, the salesman mentioned earlier, described a typical example of why men leave the setting and how they start talking while going to another place,

It was busy and we weren't, there were a lot of trolls and we weren't really going to be able to get what we wanted to do done. So, he suggested we leave. He suggested or I suggested, I don't really remember. I had been with my partner for maybe a year to a year-and-a-half, and he was -- He [Robert's partner] traveled at that point and he was gone, so I suggested we go back to my house. And, we went back to my house and we played for a few hours. And, you know at some point obviously when you get out of a public sex environment, conversation becomes more of a vehicle. I mean you're not -- for the most part, -- I don't have a lot of conversation in public sex environments. I don't think most people do. But you know ... we started talking, and we realized we have some things in common. We lived close, and we ended up becoming friends.

Even though Robert did not “have a lot of conversation in public sex environments,” he tended to have a lot of friends from PSEs. He traveled for work and met men in tearooms and then went to his hotel room to have sex. So, while he seldom talked in the actual site, he frequently befriended his public sex tricks. He met his partner of seven years in a college tearoom. Robert and his partner were the two men throwing the party where I met David, the “nudist.” They also referred a couple who had met in an adult bookstore, but I was unable to interview that couple.

While Robert talked with men he met in PSEs, George did not. George (a 31-year-old, white engineer) stated it this way,

I might have had sex with them in a public sex environment, but since I generally don't talk to them or ask their names... But, if I meet them at a party later, you can tell when some people don't want to talk with people they've met in PSEs and others who will. And if they will, I'll strike up a friendship.

George used the parks and tearooms almost exclusively for sex and seldom talked with the men he met there. He was not against becoming friends with the men he met in PSEs, but waited until he met them in a more accepted social setting and then established a friendly rapport. George was typical of the men I interviewed in that sense. Most of the men would start a conversation with someone later at a party if they felt the conversation would not compromise the other man's situation.

George was also Robert's partner. I asked him to describe how he and Robert started dating since he typically did not talk while at a PSE. He described how he and Robert met, had sex, and spent the rest of the evening together. He said,

We met in a bathroom, and... there was somebody in between us. I don't remember how we left, but we left and there's a classroom on that floor that has a lock on it and so I brought him there...we had really good sex and

[Robert] asked me if I wanted to have dinner after we were done. I said sure. So we went and had dinner and we went back to his place, and I spent the night, and then a couple of nights later we went on a date.

What was typical about George's description of how he and Robert started dating was talking after they had had sex, but going out afterwards for dinner was not a typical experience.

The participants talked about getting to know their tricks better, in order to do something more involved with them or just because they liked meeting new guys.

Darren (a 28-year-old Mexican-American waiter) who identified as gay eleven months before our interview gave a typical example of wanting to know the guy a little bit better in order to have anal sex with him. Darren's example also demonstrated where talking after sex typically occurs in a bathhouse.

Well, depending on how long I'm with them and... usually if I'm gonna fuck someone or if they're gonna fuck me, it's usually one on one except in odd circumstances... We usually start out somewhere and end up going back to a room.

A private room in a bathhouse provided greater seclusion for the partners and an opportunity to lie around, have sex, talk, and get to know each other. Darren felt uncomfortable having anal sex in public spaces because he felt it was more intimate than oral sex or mutual masturbation. He wanted a private setting in order to get to know the guy with whom he was having anal sex. Darren "usually [knew] their name and where they're from, if they're married or not, what they [did] for a living, that type of stuff."

Dusty (the office manager mentioned earlier), when I asked him why he talked with guys in the settings, responded, "I think all in all, the people that I've met and had any form of conversation with tend to be nice people. They just want people

to like them and hang out.” “Generally nice people,” is how David, the architect, described the men he talked with and later added, “I tend to get along real well with the people I meet in that type of environment.” Darren echoed those sentiments when he said casually about finding a boyfriend at the baths, “I’m a nice guy and I’m there, [so] there has to be another nice guy there.” For several of the participants, public sex settings were a source for dates or boyfriends even though the settings were constructed as anonymous and impersonal.

Talking During the Down Time

The next type of socializing that occurred involved talking with the other men in a site when the traffic was slow, there was no one willing, or no one considered attractive. Once again, while there was no one type of locale that best facilitated conversations, there were several types that, depending on each one’s architectural design, provided a space for the patrons to congregate. Also, the locale’s culture needed to allow for some talking among the users. So, if a setting allowed for some conversation without drawing unwanted attention from outsiders or violating any norms these sites were most often used for socializing. Talking during the down time most often occurred in adult bookstores, bathhouses, and parks.

Myles: Sometimes you wind up kind of standing around, lounging, kind of what’s the word, what’s the word the signs tell you not to do there?

Matt: Loitering?

Myles: Yes. (Laughing) So sometimes you’re leaning against the wall with some other guy who’s also waiting, hoping that the right type of person might show up and show an interest. I’ve gotten into conversations with them just to pass the time sometimes,

summed up Miles, the lawyer mentioned earlier. He tended to cruise adult bookstores and baths. Miles started using public sex locales almost thirty years ago. He has met two lovers in these settings and his best friend was someone he met at a bookstore. Still, not every conversation became a friendship for him, but they were enjoyable ways to pass the time even if the conversations remained superficial and only occurred once.

John (the man who had been beaten in a park mentioned earlier) talked about how he got to know the guys in the bookstores and bathhouses he cruised. He described the process this way,

You could actually let your guard down. You didn't have to worry about who was gonna come in and what they were going to do in a negative sort of way... you had more time to just sit around... you spend a lot of time seeing the same people and eventually just standing there smoking cigarettes, chit-chat kind of thing.

John met his first lover in a bathhouse and had several close friends from the bookstores and bathhouses. However, as John said, "The guys that I tricked with, I tricked with. The guys that [I] talked to, I talked to. They were not normally the same group of people." Obviously, John had a clear distinction between who he would have sex with and with whom he would talk. No other participant mentioned having such a distinction between the men they had sex with and the men they talked with in a public sex site.

Meeting Friends

Before I started the formal part of this project, I met a man at one of the adult bookstores in town. I noticed that he only seemed to be at the bookstore on Monday nights. We would nod to each other after that first meeting and then do our own

thing. During one particularly slow night we commented to each other about the crowd and then fooled around. The next time we saw each other we said hello and started talking. We shared with each other our relevant information and gossiped about the other bookstore patrons, such as who had sex and who was just watching videos. Cal spent most of his Monday nights at the bookstore. He talked during the down time with the other bookstore patrons and the clerks. I soon realized that I went to the bookstore on Monday nights to visit with Cal, not to have sex. We shared an interest in horses and frequently talked about them, our work, our families, and any new loves/tricks.

I thought about this friendship as I prepared for this project. As the interviews progressed most of the participants mentioned having acquaintances and friendships with the men they met while using a PSE. While the relationships may or may not have remained specific to the locale, these friendships became the reason for several of the men to visit the PSE. I distinguished this from talking during the down times because the purpose of going to the PSE was to catch up with friends and visit, sex was a secondary goal.

John (the communications technician who discussed why he did not use truly public sex environments) used to live in Providence, RI. We were talking about the social aspect of public sex and he elaborated on the differences he experienced between tearooms and bathhouses.

It depends. In what I consider the true public sex areas, like the parks and the rest areas..., I personally never experienced a great deal of camaraderie or social connection at those places. It was get in, get off, get out. In terms of the other ones like the baths and... depending on what venues given geographic area has to offer, they're extremely social, extremely social, and I

think, I'm sure I'm not the only one who feels that it's at least part of the reason that people go.

While living in the city he would go to the bathhouse to hang out and socialize instead of going to a bar. He talked about that time in his life with me. John is a large man and told me he was once twice the size he was when we talked. He considered the baths "a much easier social scene for [him] than the bars could ever have been because the bars were so visual and so sexually oriented." He knew the baths were sexually driven, but for him they also offered more of a social opportunity than the bars provided at that time. He described a typical evening at the baths where "there [would be] just like ten or fifteen of us just sitting there." He also described one specific night.

I remember very clearly, there was a hurricane one year and all the power and everything went out, and all these guys just showed up at the baths knowing the steam room would be broken, the lights would be off, and we all brought all the perishable food from our refrigerators and sat there and played Monopoly and cards and had a great time for six hours until the power came back on. And it was not a sex thing at all. When all that happened, it was just a place to be, to go hang out with your friends.

John's comments reflected the experiences of several of the men from my study. The baths, parks, and bookstores provided opportunities for them to meet and talk with new men. While they did not go to the baths to make friends, all realized that these sites also provided opportunities to just hang out and meet men for more than a sexual experience. Pierce (the human resources manager mentioned earlier) summed it up this way while relating his experiences with his partner in a queer neighborhood park, "but now it's kind of gotten to the point where we have so many friends, it's more of a social thing."

Another social aspect of public sex environments was offered several times during the interviews. Several of the guys would go to the PSEs with their friends, either after a night out or as the activity for the night. Instead of going to the bars, these men would make it a night at the baths or a day at the park. Tyler (the sexual health educator mentioned earlier) told me about one of his friends that he cruised with while he was an undergraduate in New York City.

Actually another really good friend I'm still in contact with... [I] met at a theater. I had a fun time too, but a lot of my fun came with being with him... he just kinda just enhanced the experience with me and we had a blast together. But, we became really good friends. We talked to each other weekly, but then we actually got together once or twice a month, go to dinner, and then go get our experience.

Tyler's experience with his friend from college reveals how the categories overlapped in the participants' experiences. His friend was someone he met while cruising at an adult bookstore. They became friends, talked weekly, and then met monthly at a public sex site to cruise, but also to hang out with each other.

James (a student) discussed his introduction to bathhouses-as-social when some casual friends invited him to join them. He said,

One group of friends actually invited me along for a night at the tubs [a bathhouse] and so I'd never gone to the tubs with a group of people. Then I went with them and discovered that they were willing to not only give information, but haul me out and give me a tour.

His statement also reflected a familiar sentiment among the group, that someone else taught them about where to go, when to go, what were the rules, and what to avoid. Most of the men mentioned someone in their PSE-using past showing them the ropes. Most were answers to questions posed to a trick or casual discussion during the down time, few were as thorough as the tours with instructions that James received. These

men showed James the bathhouse rules and etiquette. They continued to invite him out with them and through going to the bathhouses together one of these men became one of James's closest friends.

How the participants used public sex sites and became friends with each other reflects similar patterns among other men's friendships (Walker 1998). Men's friendships have been conceptualized as being about sharing activities, agentic, and instrumental (Dolgin 2001). Walker (1994) states that these conceptualizations are "more accurately viewed as cultural ideologies than as observable gender differences in behavior" (246). The friendships discussed by the participants offered similar benefits that friendships offer. Dolgin asserts, "In addition to providing fun and relaxation, friends give you a sense that someone cares about you and that you are not alone in the world" (102). Friendships were significant among gay and bisexual men who cruised for public sex. These friendships provided opportunities for novice users to learn the norms, but also allowed these men to connect with others that support their activities and their selves. While racial (Franklin 1992), class (Hansen 1992), and sexual identity (Nardi 1999) differences have been discussed in the literature, the construction of men's friendships remains relatively unchanged. As Walker states, "the knowledge of the existence of other forms of masculine friendship among working-class African American and white men [and gay men] has not influenced the ideology of friendship" (1998, 224).

Walker (1998) states that even though the literature has provided multiple versions of masculine friendships, the ideology surrounding men's friendships has remained relatively stable. Hegemonic masculine friendships are still viewed as

utilitarian and exist between men who share common activities or live near each other. So, according to the hegemonic model, men who are friends are so because of working together, being neighbors, or having kinship ties. Walker's (1994) work challenges this ideology of masculine friendships. Her critique is based on interviews with men about their behaviors, not just how they think they interact in friendships. While her research shows that men and women share stereotypes about gender differences in friendships, she also reveals that men discuss relationships and rely on each other for emotional support among *close* friends. These findings challenge gendered expectations about friendships.

Walker provides an explanation for how men can engage in friendships that challenge hegemonic masculinity and still perceive themselves as being traditionally masculine. "When men include themselves in the masculine gender category based on some behavior, they tended unreflectively to accept as given the cultural boundaries of the entire category *even if other of their behaviors contradicted those boundaries*" (1998, 226, emphasis in the original). Gender is based on multiple qualities, so men can ignore their friendship interactions that challenge a masculine friendship model and still view themselves as masculine based on some other characteristic, perhaps how they walk, their job, or their leisure activities.

Franklin (1992) discusses the intersection of race and class on men's friendships. He states that working-class African American men have holistic and intimate friendships while upwardly mobile African American men tend to have friendships that reflect hegemonic ideals about men's friendships. Nardi's (1999) work on gay men's friendships reveals that gay men develop friendships that rely on

and simultaneously challenge hegemonic masculinity. As Nardi states, “the gay men in this study...report of their both doing things and sharing activities with friends *and* of talking about personal events and emotions” with friends (144, emphasis in the original). The men’s friendships from my study seemed to resemble hegemonic ideals of masculine friendships. They became friends due to being repeatedly in close proximity to each other and their friendship was founded on their shared activity (Walker 1998). However, these friendships challenged hegemonic ideals, as well. My friendship with Cal included discussions about how he was dealing with his mother’s cancer and involved discussions about relationships, or more often the lack of a relationship. Public-sex friendships reflected aspects of utilitarianism *and* emotionality. They represent the full spectrum of gay men’s friendships and continue to offer gay and bisexual men spaces where they can relax, find support, and be with others like themselves.

Gay and bisexual men who use public sex locales find emotional and physical support from others in these marginalized spaces. Male-male sexuality and public sex are closely associated with predatory pedophilia, disease, and death. For gay and bisexual men, public sex provides opportunities to challenge such debilitating thinking by being with others like themselves. Public sex friendships, and even those anonymous exchanges, occur within a web of mutuality, respect, reciprocity, and trust. Gay and bisexual men engage in public sex with other men that honor their worth and reasons for being. I discuss these friendships and their importance to gay and bisexual men in more detail in the following chapters.

CONCLUSION

The participants experienced public sex as more than a sexual exchange. While not everyone developed the long lasting friendships that several men did, all discussed moments during their cruising that they talked with other men in the setting. Nearly two thirds of the men (nineteen out of thirty) discussed their close friendships with other men they had met while cruising a public sex site. While the geographic, architectural, and cultural attributes of a locale were important factors determining whether the men socialized in the setting, the most common indicator was whether or not a trick talked with them and everyone had talked with a trick. Most had talked with another man during the down time at a park, bathhouse, or bookstore and many have friendships with men from public sex sites.

By describing the ways that some gay and bisexual men socialize in PSEs, this chapter reveals the initial ways that PSEs provide more than a sexual exchange (Levine 1990; Diehl 2000). These socializing patterns also reflect other findings about how gay men initiate friendships with men (Nardi 1999). As in other public settings, conversations that occur in public sex settings develop into acquaintances, friendships, and for several participants, romantic relationships. In short, this chapter explores the social dynamics of impersonal sex.

CHAPTER 4

THE RELATIONSHIPS OF PUBLIC SEX

Scholars of gay male sexuality and male-male sexuality have addressed the role of public sex among men using two different conceptual models. Some scholars have employed a traditional conceptual model of public sex sites based on assumptions of anonymity and impersonality (Humphreys 1970; Karlen 1971; Saghir and Robbins 1973; Desroches 1990). Others have sought to overcome the limitations of the traditional model by suggesting more complex and more personal interactions in public sex settings (Altman 1982; Tripp 1987; Levine 1990; Leap 1999). For example, Altman claims, "the reality is more complex; encounters at the baths, in parks, even in public toilets can lead to long-lasting relationships and intimate friendships, and 'promiscuity,' in that sense of having a large number of sexual partners, needs not mean an absence of serious and committed relationships" (175). Likewise, Tripp, while discussing the assumption of anonymity used by older studies, states, "sex with a stranger [in public] is often much more complex" (106). Levine discusses tricking, or casual sex, usually a one-night stand, among "clones" and stated that relationships frequently evolved from tricking. While tricking among clones did not necessarily occur in public sex locales, often times it did. More recently, in Nardi's (1999) study of gay men's friendships, he introduces a man who had met his best friend in a tearoom on campus while he was in graduate school. In short, a rising tide of studies explicitly and implicitly problematizes the assumptions of anonymity and impersonal sex as the only experience between men in public sex settings. This literature hints at a more complex conceptual model of public sex sites than ones that

are based on assumptions of anonymity and impersonality. Scarce attention has been paid to the types of friendships that develop among men who use public sex sites. The extant literature on public sex among men introduces the idea of these relationships, but rarely explores the relevance of these relationships to the men.

In Chapter Three, I discussed how gay and bisexual men transform an anonymous and impersonal sexual encounter into an opportunity for socializing, affection, romance, intimacy, and friendship with each other. In this chapter, I examine the types of relationships that are formed from those interactions. I draw on interviews with twenty-five gay, three queer, and two bisexual men. As Nardi (1999) states “gay men, as a whole, experience more than just two categories of lovers/friends” (78). The men I interviewed established relationships with others that blurred the boundaries between lover, friend, and anonymous partner. However, the men relied on traditional terms to discuss their relationships with me. Those relationships that were easily defined by traditional terms were discussed at more length than those relationships that were not so easily defined. So, while this study explores alternatives to standards of coupling, sex, and privacy, the organization of the categories reflected the language used by the men during our interviews. Scholars have discussed the multiple ways that gay men’s lives, friendships, and families have challenged hegemonic standards of masculinity, sexuality, and kinship, and how gay men continue to use these standards to make sense of their lived experiences (Connell 1992; Nardi 1999; Carrington 1999). In this sense, my participants reflected similar findings by other scholars.

Friedman (1993) states that friendships have the ability to foster and support nontraditional ideas and behaviors. Public sex friendships, like other friendships, provide gay and bisexual men opportunities to find support for their behavior that challenges the traditional notions of relationships, sex, and privacy. Friendships offer more than support for nontraditional behavior, they also contain an element of community building, mobilizing, and effecting social change (Nardi 1999). Nardi argues: "how gay people develop an identity by building communities of choice, organize a political presence and transform social life, and structure space ... is related, in part, to friendship networks" (189). Gay and bisexual men's use of public space for sexual cruising dramatically reflects the role of friendship networks. These friendship networks within public sex settings provide psychological support and educational opportunities for one another as they maintain a culture of public sex. Public sex exists, in part, due to the user's acceptance of certain public sex cultural norms regarding their behavior. The friendships that emerge from public sex offer many users an acceptance of their nontraditional behaviors in a society where few individuals accept public sex.

Four different groups emerged from the interviews based on the types of relationships the participants discussed creating with the men they met at a public sex locale. I placed the men in the different groups based on how they had framed their experiences. The categories reflect the men's *interpretation* of their experiences, not necessarily their experiences. Several of the men (seven out of twelve) who stated that they did not develop friendships with men they met in public sex sites, actually did. The blurred distinctions between the categories underscore the contradictions

that existed among the participants' understandings of their public sex and their experiences. What the men discussed during the interviews revealed their tendency to rely on the "anonymous and impersonal" assumptions about public sex, and not necessarily what happened to them while they were cruising for sex. Nearly all of the men (twenty-five of the thirty, 83.3%) had had some type of relationship with another man who they met or saw at a public sex environment (PSE).

The seven men whose comments contradicted their experiences were concerned about how they would appear to other PSE users if they admitted that they dated men they met in public sex locales. Negative stereotypes about men who use public sex sites abound. "They think that we're people who don't have regular relationships, that we're...this sort of solitary perv [who] can't function in the regular world," said James describing the "public's" perceptions of men who use public sex locales. His uncle was gay and the family knew that the uncle picked-up men at the bus stop. His family thought the children needed to be protected from these men, and this uncle. He went on to add, "'those men'...were somehow not trustworthy and somehow innately unsafe and maybe fell in the same category as like men who offered candy to little kids." James's (a 25-year-old undergraduate) comments about what the public thought were shared by nearly all of the men interviewed. When the men admitted they dated someone they met from a PSE, they confronted their own internalization of these assumptions that they were unable to have "regular relationships," "not trustworthy," and "innately unsafe." When men befriended each other in public sex sites they were reclaiming images that have been used against gay

and bisexual men as well. These images of men who use public sex sites as unfit and/or dangerous serve to contain and shame gay and bisexual men.

First, I discuss the “no relationship” group ($n = 8$). This group stated they developed no relationships, other than the sexual one, with the men they met in a PSE. Yet, half of these men had actually made friends with men they met while using PSEs and two of them had met lovers in these settings. Second, I discuss the “acquaintance” group ($n = 4$). The second group had casual friendships or acquaintances with others from PSEs. Again, similar to the men from the first group, the men’s comments did not accurately reflect their experiences. Three of these men had dated someone they met while cruising a public sex site. Third, I introduce the last two groups, “friends” and “lovers.” After I introduce these groups, I discuss them individually. These groups comprised the rest of my sample, eighteen men. The “friends” group discussed their friendships with the men they met while cruising public sex sites. The “lovers” group developed romantic relationships that ranged from long-term dating to live-in partnerships with men from public sex settings.

While twenty-nine of the participants I talked with had friends with whom they shared their public sex stories, I was interested in those relationships that originated in public sex settings. I wanted to know what type of relationships emerged from anonymous sexual settings. David (an out white gay man in his thirties) summed up the types of relationships that emerged from public sex when he said,

I have met and become friends with, lovers with, had affairs, been sex partners, just been peers. I’ve had all sorts of different relations with people I have met at the public sex environments and continue to have relationships.

His experience, while not universal, was typical for the men interviewed. This chapter's examination of the types of relationships that emerge from PSE usage refines the existing conceptual model of gay and bisexual men's use of public sex settings.

No Relationships

Eight men (26.7%) recalled not developing any relationships with the men they met cruising for sex at PSEs. This group most resembled the findings of Humphreys (1970) and Desroches (1990). Both authors conclude that tearooms provided a space for men to obtain anonymous sex – a quick, emotionally detached sexual release -- only. These men described their use of PSE as strictly sexual. They reinforced the assumptions of anonymity and impersonal sex that surround PSEs by using these settings for that quick, easy, and detached sexual release. Nonetheless, four of these men had developed friendships and dated men they had met while cruising. One currently lives with someone he met at a public sex site. During the interviews, they stated that they did not develop relationships with others from PSEs now. However, at different times in their lives they used PSEs differently and thus had different experiences.

As the reasons for using public sex venues changed for the participants, their recollections embraced the more traditional models to frame all their experiences. Their memories relied on the traditional model of public sex that constructed public sex as anonymous and impersonal even as their experiences provided contradictory examples. The assumptions of public sex being anonymous and impersonal and the perception of men who use public sex settings as unfit and dangerous affected the

ways public sex experiences were interpreted and recalled by the participants. When a PSE user says that he is looking for a lover in these settings he must confront others' understandings of public sex as a quick, emotionless sexual encounter. He may be perceived as dim or desperate since he is looking for commitment from men seeking "anonymous" sex. Public sex is not viewed as the best place for a man looking for a romantic partner to find one. These contradictions reveal the importance for these men to appear knowledgeable about public sex sites and the reasons for using them. For, if the men know what function public sex sites serve, then they will not be thought of as "desperate" by other cruisers.

George first started using tearooms in his senior year of college after asking a friend where he could meet guys for sex on a more regular basis. He had been having sex since he was 14 and those previous sexual experiences were mostly "hit or miss due to unique circumstances." In college he used the campus tearooms to meet sex partners and other gay men. He started going almost daily and was soon able to distinguish between the regulars and "the new meat." While his use of tearooms at college was for sex, George got to know some of the men with whom he had sex. "There were people who I had ongoing [interactions with], we'd see each other and we always had good sex, so, we'd ... follow each other into the bathroom with the door with the locks on it," said George, describing how he developed these ongoing encounters and how he was able to get to know some of the men. Five and half years ago George met his partner in another college tearoom. He and his partner both use PSEs today, but now, for George "it's more about sex" than when he was younger.

Robert (35 years old, gay, and Hispanic) had met his partner in a bathhouse ten years ago, but he has had no other relationship with the men he has met in PSEs. Robert was attracted to straight-identified men and cruised bookstores that had a mostly straight-identified clientele. Robert was the only man in my study to specify that he almost exclusively sought out straight-identified men. His lack of other relationships with these men coupled with Humphreys's (1970) findings suggest that gay and bisexual men use public sex settings differently than straight men.

Mannington had only one friendship in the fourteen years he had been using PSEs, but considered himself to have never become friends with anyone he had met in these settings. He was a 35-year-old florist, considered himself "physically bisexual, [but] emotionally homosexual," and everyone in his life knew that he was gay except for his dad. While telling why he had only had one friendship in all the years he had been using PSEs, he said, "There is not a lot of talk or a lot of opportunity to get to know each other better." Even though these settings do not always provide opportunities to "get to know each other better" he thought they were "a lot more close-knit than [they] appear." Because of this he was a little surprised to discover that he had only one friendship from his public sex. Mannington enjoyed "edge sex" and he was very comfortable discussing his sexual behaviors with his friends. "Edge sex" was a term Mannington used to describe sex that pushed the boundaries of acceptable sex even among kinkier individuals. For example, Mannington participated in sexual play with feces, or scat play and tells his friends. His friendship circle accepts and celebrates the group members' sexual escapades in a manner that is uncommon among the other participants' friendship circles. Sex plays

an important role in his friendships. During our interview, he was expecting a phone call from a friend who was at one of the local bathhouses to let him know if the crowd was a good one. Most of his friends also participated in public sex.

Mannington and his friends frequently discussed their escapades with one another, offering advice such as when to go and who was a good sex partner. Mannington's sexual willingness and his openness about his sexual encounters with his friends suggested that he would be someone who befriended men that he met while at public sex sites. He openly challenged conventional thinking about sex. He felt because of his adventuresome sexuality that he should have had more friends from public sex settings. He was surprised to realize he did not have more friendships or acquaintances than he did. Mannington and his friends provided support for each other's public sex outings. They already had a group of friends with which they could share their public sex stories. Mannington's friends fulfilled his need to befriend other men in order to obtain acceptance based on his public sex. He already had a group of friends whose attitudes challenged the public images of men who cruise public sex sites. These friends offered relationships that helped Mannington accept his public sex, perhaps reducing the chance that his public sex tricks would become friends. He already had support for his behavior that most of society views as problematic.

There were four men who did not develop relationships with the men they met while using PSEs. Two were out gay men and two were closeted bisexual men. I discuss "outness" in this chapter because social histories have suggested that public sex encounters provided early foundations for contemporary gay male communities

(Chauncey 1994; Bérubé, 1996; Howard 1999; Bergman 1999; Higgins 1999). This is not to say that every gay and bisexual man who used these settings established that link to the larger gay men's communities. The participants' "outness," while important, did not consistently reveal what type of relationships they developed, or if they even developed relationships. Jay (a 37-year-old singing waiter) was out to everyone in his life and used PSEs about once a year, perhaps even less. He started using back rooms at bars when he moved to a large east coast city about ten years ago. Since moving back home, he has "not continued a relationship, dating, or friendship with any of the men that I have initially met at any kind of PSE." Although his PSE use was never frequent, Jay would share with his friends his public sex experiences. Jay used the backrooms and tearooms because they allowed him to do what he wanted with little involvement from the other men. He put it this way, "it was very convenient and quick and fun and no emotional repercussions. No expectations from anybody else." Jay also viewed his use of PSEs as a form of "rebellion against my former restraints that I placed upon myself."

Another man who did not develop friendships with other men from his public sex was C.E.O. (the initials he used for his pseudonym). He was 37 and worked as a facilities manager and everybody in his world knew he was gay. He was part of the larger gay men's communities and had a partner. He frequented the park in his city considered the "gay park" since it was in the city's oldest and most visible gay neighborhood. In addition, it was close to where he lived and provided an anonymous and emotionally detached sexual encounter. Because C.E.O. used this particular park, most of his partners were other gay men. Jay and C.E.O. both share their public sex

stories with friends, and C.E.O. actually runs into friends while he cruises the park. So, while neither man had developed an ongoing relationship with someone they initially met at a PSE, they did have friendships with men who used PSEs.

Of all the men from this study Jimbo and Jerrod most resembled the tearoom patrons Humphreys focused on, because they were closeted about their male-male sexual experiences and maintained the assumption of heterosexuality. Jerrod was 22 years old, bisexual, Hispanic, and part of the fraternity system where he went to college. He was engaged, and his fiancée did not know about his male-male sexual experiences. None of his friends or family knew about his bisexuality and he did not consider himself part of the LGBT communities. He thought his friends, family, and fiancée would ostracize him if they knew about his bisexuality. I had seen him several times on campus, and we always exchanged smiles. We started to say hi when we saw each other and shared brief bits of information, mostly about the tearoom traffic. One day I told him about my study and asked if he would volunteer. During our interview, he said that I was among only a handful of men that he would acknowledge in public. Jerrod had given me directions on how to interact with him when we saw each other in public. He explained that my teaching at the college afforded him an easy explanation about how he knew me, if anyone asked.

Jimbo was 38, and, depending on who asked, he was either bisexual-experimental or heterosexual, but most often he identified as heterosexual. Jimbo's girlfriend knew about his sex play in the parks and supported his sexual interests. She also provided a circle of gay male friends who accepted Jimbo's bisexual-experimentation and his public sex activity. There was an open invitation between

the men and Jimbo to join them at the baths, and they would teach him how to cruise the baths. His girlfriend set this up on Jimbo's behalf. However, his circle of close friends was unaware of his male-male sexual activities that were mostly public sex activities. While he was aware of the social aspect of public sex, his male-male sexual encounters were physical and not emotional or social. And, his girlfriend's acceptance gave him support like other men in this group had outside support.

In sum, the men's understanding of their public sex reinforced the traditional conceptual model of public sex (Humphreys 1970) even as their own experiences suggested alternative models for understanding gay and bisexual men's use of public sex locales. All of the men in the "no relationship" group stated they had no relationships with the men they met in a PSE; however, only four of the men's experiences supported their statements. Of those four, two of them had friends who were aware of their public sex and occasionally would run into friends at the park or the bookstores. The group's experiences in PSEs actually supported other studies' (Tripp 1975; Altman 1982; Levine 1990) suggestions that public sex for gay and bisexual men was more than just anonymous and impersonal sex. For gay and bisexual men, public sex has the potential to provide a friendship network that offers acceptance and support for their nontraditional behaviors.

Acquaintances

The second group of men ($n = 4$) developed casual friendships or acquaintances with the men they met while cruising for sex. Andy was 23, identified as Hispanic, and was a sexual health educator for gay, bisexual, and men who had sex with men. Acquaintances were "people I felt comfortable with, people that I would

go out with but I wouldn't say [they were] close friends," said Andy. He distinguished between acquaintances and close friends by how much he relied on them. Dusty's distinctions between acquaintance and friend clarified what Andy implied. As Dusty explained:

Friends were people that I'd have in my house, you know, for a holiday type thing, not like just come over ...for a movie or I would call, if I ever needed anything desperately or was very upset or sad.

Nardi (1999) suggests that friends offer several different kinds of support. They provide emotional support when one is down and support to be truly oneself. Friends support by being open, honest, tolerant, and loyal. They provide support to go beyond the limits of what one could do. They provide support to maintain and strengthen identity. Nardi describes these as the "ineffable components" of friendship that many struggle to identify when distinguishing friends from others. During the interviews, it was clear that the men made distinctions between who was a friend and who was an acquaintance, and, as Nardi suggests, describing the basis for those distinctions was difficult for the men.

Dusty had few close friends and liked it that way. He was 31, white, and was a facilities manager. Hank, like Dusty, did not have a lot of friends in his life, so he considered his lack of friendships with men from PSEs typical for him. Hank was 33, white, and was an unemployed electrician who realized during our interview that he used PSEs more than he thought. At first, he said he had only used baths maybe once or twice a year. Our interview was the first time Hank had really thought about his public sex, beyond when were the best times to go based on his previous experiences. As our interview continued, Hank would return to earlier questions and change his

answers. He continued to add to his list of PSEs and later remarked, "I guess I go kinda often." By this point his list included tearooms, parks, backrooms in bars, and bookstores, as well. Hank, Dusty, and Andy recognized the anonymous aspect of public sex but also had used public sex as an opportunity to ask men out on a dates. Dusty's date turned into a three-year relationship that involved moving across country with the man.

Corky was the only one of these four who had not dated someone he had met while using a PSE. Corky was 33, a scientific researcher and community activist, and had stopped going to tearooms because he was in a new relationship with a man who did not approve of public sex. Besides his boyfriend, he had several friends who strongly disapproved of public sex and Corky internalized their judgements. He held traditional relationship ideals and often felt disappointed when he used tearooms, especially when he did not meet someone, or had sex with someone he thought others would consider unattractive. Corky met several of his tearoom partners in other social settings and then developed casual friendships with them. He became a friend to one of these men because they started meeting for lunches. After the man moved away they did not keep in touch. So, while he was once a friend since they lost contact Corky considered that friendship an acquaintanceship now.

These men almost always used the traditional model of public sex behavior to describe what type of relationships they developed with other men from these settings. As I asked more directed questions requiring them to identify whether they had ever met someone socially, dated someone, or formed romantic attachments with someone from a public sex venue, these participants recalled different men that they

had forgotten they initially met in a public sex setting. Dusty, because he lived with the man for three years, was the only one of this group who offered the information without being directly asked about romantic partnerships. Corky, Andy, and Hank claimed to have had only acquaintances from the PSEs, until I asked them specific questions about dating, loving, and socializing with men from PSEs.

Holstein and Gubrium (2000) state,

Configurations of interpretive resources, orientations, and concerns may coalesce in and around any enduring group, setting, or institution from the most formally organized – such as prisons or the army – to the most casual going concerns, like children's play groups. (162)

These configurations provide ways of thinking, seeing, and talking about participants' experiences. Holstein and Gubrium labeled these configurations that participants use "virtual paradigms of experience." These virtual paradigms of experience, or conceptual models, are also shaped by participants' use of them. The traditional model of public sex among men discouraged the recognition of these relationships and influenced how memories about public sex were created and recalled. After an interview in which someone remembered the origin of a date, romantic or social outing, which had been previously obscured, several guys commented that the new memory allowed them to re-evaluate their public sex. The men who remembered forgotten memories during the interviews developed a different consciousness about public sex. Their experiences contradicted the older model of how public sex occurred and why men engaged in this behavior and their new consciousness shaped how the men thought about their experiences.

These two groups, “no relationships” and “acquaintances,” illustrate the anonymous and impersonal aspects of public sex and simultaneously hint at the social aspects of public sex. The next two sections move the discussion of public sex among gay and bisexual men in a new direction to more fully portray the range of interpersonal relationships among public sex cruisers.

Friends and Lovers

The significance of public sex in many gay and bisexual men’s lives was revealed as the men started discussing their friendships with other men from public sex settings. Nardi introduces his study of gay men’s friendships by stating, “Friendship networks are the avenues through which gay social worlds are constructed, the sites upon which gay men’s identities and communities are formed” (1999, 13). Friends are an important aspect of gay men’s lives because they socialize gay and bisexual men to central concepts of identity, community, and political activism (Nardi). In an oppressively heterosexist and homophobic culture, gay and bisexual men’s friendships offer an alternative to a dominant culture that views gay men’s lives and sexuality with suspicion and, at times, violent disgust. This is particularly true for men who participate in public sex. Similar to the pre-Stonewall men that Chauncey (1994) and Howard (1999) discuss, the participants relied on the other men who use public sex locales for support, socializing opportunities, and acceptance.

Gay men are viewed as outsiders threatening mainstream society, and, as public sex participants, they are demonized, even among the mainstream gay and lesbian community. Public sex friendships among gay and bisexual men offer the

same benefits that other men's friendships offer: acceptance, trust, help, and intimacy (Dolgin 2001). Nardi (1999) suggests that friendships among gay men also provide opportunities of identity development, community access, and community development. These outcomes are not unique to men; Friedman (1993) suggests similar outcomes from friendships for women. Friendships are voluntary. They fulfill abstract personal needs rather than a particular goal or task (Wiseman 1986). Public sex sites continue to provide space for gay and bisexual men to meet others like themselves, thus strengthening their sense of identity and community.

Extending Nardi's (1999) ideas concerning gay men's friendships as a means for political involvement, several of the men from these groups also considered their public sex as political activism. These participants viewed their public sex as a queer reclamation of heterosexual public space, as I discuss more in a later chapter. Public sex posed a challenge to standards of sexual expression that reinforced the couple and privacy as ideal. For Brad (a white 44-year-old consultant) PSEs were the only places that were completely gay. He considered anyone in those settings gay, regardless of how they identified themselves. As he said,

[The straight-identified guys] may not be totally comfortable with it, but they're comfortable enough to be there. I guess there's a big part of me that feels like...places like this...its one thing that the gay community has that the straight world just doesn't take over.

Eighteen of the thirty men interviewed told me about friendships or romances they had had with men they initially met at a PSE. Although twenty-five men had experiences of friendship or romance overall, I only incorporated the men who answered "yes" when I asked whether or not they had developed friendships or romantic relationships in these two groups. This represented nearly two-thirds of my

sample. Four of the men were in their twenties, seven were in their thirties, four were in their forties, and three were in their fifties. Seventeen of the nineteen men's experiences suggested that if one developed friendships with other men then they were more likely to acknowledge and use public sex environments as social venues as well. The participants from these groups tended to talk more openly about their public sex with their close friends, several going to PSEs with their friends.

Friends

Randy only experienced one friendship using PSEs, but his experience speaks to the level of attachment, caring, and support that existed among men using PSEs. Randy was 40-years-old, a writer and editor for a scientific lab and first started going to a bookstore while away at college. He was 18 and "just coming out." His father had died the year before and he was angry, depressed, and "using a lot of substances at the time." He put it this way: "I started using LSD that year and I was smoking pot a lot and drinking a lot. So, I was sort of open to a lot of things that were kind of crossing boundaries." He still goes to bathhouses and parks today, but does not engage in sex because of his health concerns and he is looking for the perfect man.

Randy described his college years as a lonely time in his life. He shared this,

I was out to a few select people, but not very many and I was getting some bad vibes from people that I came out to, so I accepted it myself but I didn't like it. I recognized that that's the way it was, but I was kind of like upset about it, so ... if I'm gonna be gay and miserable my whole life, I may as well do what I can do.

This was how Randy explained his state of mind and use of bookstores at that time in his life. He went on to describe how a typical night started for him, "I would get drunk or high when I would go, so kind of like I would just get in the groove."

However, during the summer before his senior year of college he went hitchhiking across the West Coast, and he met someone. Randy described how they met:

At the end of the trip I was going back to graduate from college...I was unhappy because the trip was ending and I just didn't know what the future held, and I walked out of a gay bar. This guy passed me and we looked back and he was looking back and we circled the block, and then we ended up having sex in his truck on a mountain overlooking town and then he took me home. He lived out in the country in a school bus; he was a hippy, with his partner of like fifteen years. His partner woke me up the next morning – his partner was angelic too, so I had sex with his partner and then they were both home that night and I stayed one more day and then I left. I was in love with both of them. It was the funniest thing. I went back for one more night and they seemed happy to have me and then I left and then we started writing letters and something unlocked inside me by meeting them because it was like, it was the first time I'd met a couple who I really could relate to. It was like WOW! It's possible to fall in love and be whatever normal is. It was kinda like realizing "Oh, it's possible!"

Randy credited these friendships with allowing him to accept his gayness, his father's death, and helping him to stop drinking and using drugs. When I asked Randy to describe the type of relationship he had with these men he said, "It became a very warm friendship. And I saw them a couple more times. I made trips back and yeah, we developed a long-term friendship that continues with one of them." The other partner had since passed away.

For many of the men, public sex provided opportunities to meet other gay men and transition into a gay identity and community as they were coming out. Younger and older men alike have used public sex locales to gain sexual experience with other men, explore their male-male sexual desires and fantasies, and connect with the larger gay men's communities. James (a white, queer, 25-year-old, who was attending college) put it this way: "it was sort of my only entrance into the community at the time." Miles (a white, 57-year-old lawyer who identified as gay) also commented on

public sex being his access to other gay men sexually and socially. After commenting on other people's attitudes that public sex is anonymous, he added:

But I actually see it as an opportunity to make friends among other things. I have made some of my best friends in public sex places. Met some very nice people there. There was a time when that was really probably the only way I had of meeting other gay people.

Today, Miles is involved in social and political organizations for gay men and meets men through these organizations, as well as friends. When public sex was his only way to meet other gay people, Miles was married, closeted about his emerging gay identity, and living in a small town in a conservative state.

James (a gay, white, 47-year-old self-employed artist and masseur) described what it was like in a small city thirty years ago: "it was how men met when I came out was [through] public sex environments." The men James met while cruising the restroom at the mall and the parks became his social circle and his entrée to the larger gay and lesbian community. At the time, he was recently divorced and still serving in the military and was uncomfortable about coming out. He knew he was gay but was not ready to come out publicly. So, the restrooms and parks became a way to be gay but not have to do it publicly. As he described it:

It was the friendly circle that went [to the restrooms and parks]. You got involved in that circle and from that circle you could actually get invited to parties, which was the larger gay community back then rather than the bars. The bars were for the out, out, out people.... But the larger gay community back then was mostly a social circle and that generated from the tearooms and the park sex.

For others, becoming friends with someone from these settings was just about meeting someone interesting and then getting together later outside of the PSE or catching up with each other while at the PSE. For example, Alex, who was 38, white, and gay and a psychologist who was professionally closeted except with his business partner, met his best friend at the local bookstore. He also keeps in touch with an ex-

partner whom he met at a bathhouse. They “talk every other week and maybe see each other once a month.” James, an Asian American, 45-year-old programmer who identified as gay talked about a man he recently met at the baths and how they were becoming friends:

...I met this guy at the bathhouses and this was last September or August (over a year ago) and since then we’ve become friends and in fact we’ve been spending our weekends at each other’s places recently. He was at my place last night and left this morning, and I was at his place the weekend before.

This friendship has the potential to become a romantic relationship, but for now, James said they both wanted to remain friends.

Public sex sites offered these men the space to experiment with male-male sexuality, test having a gay or bisexual identity, connect with the larger LGBT communities, they also provided a space to create friendships with other men like themselves. Public sex sites were another setting for gay and bisexual men to initiate, develop, and maintain friendships. Nardi (1999) reviews friendship literature and explores the ways that gay men’s friendships support and challenge findings about masculine friendships. He states that men become friends with other men who they do things with and share the same physical space. The same structural features that affected all other public sites affect public sex settings. So, often the same men used the same setting at the same time of day or the same day of the week due to job commitments, class schedules, and family obligations. These men recognized each other over time and might have began talking with each other. And, as Nardi explains,

Friendships serve a dual purpose of connecting individuals...to others who are perceived to be...similar to themselves, while simultaneously linking people...to the larger communities of other gay men and lesbians (166).

The participants' experiences provide insight into the continual role of public sex sites to offer gay and bisexual men a venue to meet other like-minded men. These insights suggest that public sex sites remain an important and vital aspect of gay and bisexual men's social lives, not just necessities of pre-Stonewall life (Vacha 1985; Chauncey 1994; Howard 1999).

Lovers

Ten (33.3%) of the participants developed romantic relationships with the men they met at PSEs. Seven of the men met lovers in a public restroom, two met a lover in a bathhouse, and one in a park. All of these men, except one, also maintained friendships with other men they had met at PSEs. While not necessarily looking for a romantic partner these men were nevertheless aware that they could possibly meet someone in these anonymous and impersonal settings. For example, I interviewed two couples who had done so. George and Robert met in a campus tearoom, and Blake and Pierce met in tearoom in a mall. Darren (a 28-year-old Mexican American singing waiter) summed up the chance of meeting someone in a PSE. He said, "Do I look for a relationship in these places? Yes and no." Darren knew he should not look for a romantic relationship in a public sex site, but he has already met a "sugar daddy." He believed that there was just as much of a chance of meeting a boyfriend in the parks and baths than there was meeting one in a bar. Darren enjoyed the convenience of tearooms and bathhouses, but also the possibility of meeting someone. Darren's ideas were similar to the other men of this group: while they go for the convenience of public sex, they also go to meet new sex partners and, sometimes, possibly something more.

Miles (the lawyer mentioned earlier) met two of his male lovers in PSEs. The first lover he met at an adult bookstore and the second one he met at a highway rest stop. He met his first lover while he was still married but living apart from his wife. Typical of most anonymous sexual encounters that become relationships, the two men left the bookstore and walked to Miles's nearby apartment. The next morning, they exchanged phone numbers and names. The other man called before Miles could call him. They were together for fourteen years. Miles met his second male lover after he had publicly come out as a gay man. His second lover moved in within a few months of meeting, partly because he needed a place to stay, but, as Miles jokingly explained, partly due to the fast pace of the relationship: "I'm not saying these relationships were good relationships, but they were intense ones, and they were intimate." They were together for four years.

Blake and Pierce met each other in a mall restroom. They were both married with children when they met and still unresolved about their sexual identities. Blake was 54, Caucasian, and identified as homosexual. He was a retired accountant. Pierce was 51, Caucasian, and identified as gay. At the time of the interviews, both men were comfortably out as gay men to everyone in their lives. Also, they had recently started an adult gay video company. Blake responded to my AOL screen name and we set up an interview. I arrived at his building and entered his security code. He had forgotten our interview, but buzzed me in and introduced his partner to me. They mentioned that they had met in a mall restroom and Pierce volunteered to be interviewed, too. We scheduled a second interview and both men swore they

would not forget this time. Pierce, in a joking manner, reassured me this time not to worry because he was the schedule-keeper for them.

Blake and I sat down first while Pierce went into the study to recruit models online. Blake's history of meeting men in tearooms for sex was typical of Humphreys's findings for married men who needed to keep their public sex a secret. He rarely had sex with any man twice and rarely gave his real name. He said that all changed when he met Pierce. He described all of his public sex that occurred now as activities that he and Pierce do as a couple, as games they play with each other. He told me that, "about seven out of ten of our friends right now started with a casual sexual encounter at the park in a three-way situation."

I asked Blake about how he and Pierce had met. He told me the story at their dining-room table. He began, "There was just something magical there" and then continued,

We saw each other in this bathroom about six months prior to our meeting and I was just blown out of the water by it and he was just so cute...actually that's what made me go back to that place the next six months was hoping I'd run into him...he zipped up and walked out...So, I followed him.

Blake followed Pierce into the employee lounge's restroom of the department store where Pierce was working and kissed him. He said he "could actually feel the sparks. It was incredible." They exchanged phone numbers, and when Pierce did not call, Blake went to the store where Pierce worked to see him again.

Within a few months Blake and Pierce revealed their feelings for each other and decided to rent an apartment together. Blake "chickened out," since he was unable to leave the security of his "wife and kids and the house and the two cars." As he was telling me about their rough beginning Blake started to tear up and sheepishly

grinned at me, slightly red from being a little embarrassed. He paused, lit a cigarette, and then continued. Ultimately, Blake gathered up the courage to leave and finally commit to Pierce. That was nineteen years ago. Prior to meeting Pierce, all of Blake's public sex had been one-time exchanges that remained anonymous, due to his fear of having his secret exposed.

I interviewed Pierce immediately after interviewing Blake. While Pierce's past use of PSEs was different from Blake's, he confirmed that their public sex today involved both of them. Typically, they go to the park together meet someone and then take him back to their apartment. Pierce was the oldest son of a Catholic farm family. The farm had been in the family for four generations. He had had male lovers in college, but was emotionally unprepared when one of those lovers revealed that he was in love with Pierce. He decided to get married thinking that his male-male sexual desires would go away. The desires did not go away as Pierce had hoped. He used the tearooms to meet men who would take him back to their place for sex. The tearooms provided a sexual release with other men at that time in his life. When I asked him why he currently used PSEs he said, "Because we're together," referring to Blake. He viewed their public sex as another opportunity to be together as a couple. He described the first time they had sex, "I'd experienced things that I didn't know existed in terms of sexuality, and there was an emotional aspect to it also." Pierce also described that first kiss with Blake in the employee's lounge where he worked as stirring feelings in him that were different than anything else he had felt before.

I listened as ten men talked about the lovers they met while cruising a public sex site. They described their first meeting, their “first” date, and the ineffable spark that informed each man that this time was different. These men employed a sexual ideology that reflected the “libertarian sexual ideology” expressed by gay men during the 60s and 70s (Seidman 1991). For gay men, during the late 60s and early 70s, sexual expression became more broadly understood not just as an intimate expression of love, but also an expression of pleasure, adventure, and community building. These ten men viewed sex as a medium of self-fulfillment not just an expression of romantic love. “The carnal and expressive pleasures of casual sex were not justified as a substitute for more stable, long-term intimate arrangements but as their complement” (Seidman 186). These participants’ experiences suggested the continued acceptance of public sex as complementing their romantic relationships, not just an alternative. After a conservative sexual shift in response to AIDS, these men continued to embrace a sexual attitude reflective of the gay men of the 60s and 70s. The men told stories of falling in love that resembled most stories of falling in love except for where they met.

The underlying assumptions are left intact and unexamined when studies rely on the traditional definition of public sex. Social histories (Chauncey 1994; Howard 1999) and memoirs (Vacha 1985) reveal the obscured by-products of gay men seeking relationships with other men in the bars, bathhouses, tearooms, and streets prior to the contemporary gay rights activism. These men were initiating, developing, and maintaining new identities and building community networks. While visible queer communities exist today in most urban centers, gay and bisexual men continue

to use public sex sites in order to make connections with other men. How and why gay and bisexual men use public sex locales remains unexplored as social scholars focus on what type of men are having sex in these settings and what they are doing. When scholars focus on the type men who use public sex settings, a nuanced understanding of the role of these sites remains obscured. Gay and bisexual men's use of public sex sites challenge the assumptions that continue to influence contemporary thinking about the role of public sex in men's lives.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I explored how gay and bisexual men used public sex settings to meet new friends and lovers. These findings refine the traditional conceptual model of public sex. Public sex among men has traditionally been presented as a site for men to quickly and anonymously have sex with other men. These traditional models tended to downplay or ignore the social component of gay and bisexual men's use of public sex sites. The majority of my interviewees (twenty-six out of thirty) recalled acquaintances, friends, and dates whom they met while cruising tearooms, baths, parks, or gym locker rooms. Friendships and romances provided resources for gay and bisexual men. These men were not only creating social circles; they were building communities that supported them and creating spaces where they find refuge and acceptance. By acknowledging the interpersonal relationships of public sex, the conceptual model is expanded. This new information alters the way one understands

the process of identity and community development, especially for individuals who find themselves excluded from legitimated communities.

CHAPTER 5

SHARING IS CARING:

MASCULINITIES, CARING, AND PUBLIC SEX

Public sex offers opportunities to share one's self with others in many ways. However, as queer authors have chronicled, all too often the interest in public sex focuses on the risk of infection from sharing body fluids. The focus placed on sharing body fluids masks societal anxieties about public sexualities that range from women sex workers in brothels and the streets to gay men in bathhouses (Pendleton 1996; Alexander 1996; Elovitz and Edwards 1996; Bérubé 1996), instead of recognizing the symbolic meanings and emotional connections that occur among some participants in these locales. Again, I argue that gay and bisexual men often create emotional attachments with other men they meet in public sex settings. Caring personal relationships, as well as the impersonal ones that were initiated in public sex settings demonstrate how the gender order is altered and simultaneously reproduced.

No single theory is sufficient to explore gay and bisexual men's use of public sex sites. In this chapter, I explore the ethic of caring among men who use public sex settings by combining three existing works. Connell (1992) states that gay men's lives rely on and challenge hegemonic masculinities. Nardi (1999) suggests that having sex with friends can reveal the nuanced ways that gay men's sexualities combine aspects of both heterosexual masculinity and femininity. King (1998) examines caring by men who teach primary-school children. He explores how their work challenges writings that suggest caring is women's work.

Men who use public sex settings experience caring. This sense of caring is concealed when relying on a monolithic masculinity. Therefore, I relied on more contemporary notions of gender that emphasized multiple masculinities. I argue that public sex provides men opportunities to care for and be cared for.

MASCULINITIES

I regularly teach an undergraduate sexuality course. Last semester, a gay student who was unhappy with the grade his teaching assistant (TA) had assigned his term paper asked that I reevaluate the paper. The TA had docked his paper a letter grade because he did not include one of the class themes required for the paper. He had analyzed his experience in a gay bathhouse. The class theme he did not address in his paper dealt with gendered sexualities. I agreed with the TA's evaluation of the paper, and when I discussed his paper with him I asked, "Why didn't you deal with gendered sexualities in your paper?" He responded that his paper was about his bathhouse trip and since no women were present gender was not an issue. I asked if he anally penetrated his partner or was penetrated. I asked if gender affected how he perceived himself based on which behavior he preferred. He looked at me with a bemused smile on his face. His reaction stemmed first from his surprise that I would ask him such a question and, second, from his realization that women did not need to be present to see how gender affected his interactions in the world.

While many continue to conceptualize gender as interactions between the sexes, gender also influences same-sex interactions. In fact, Connell argues that masculinities are preformed for other men since it is men who bestow one another with the status of masculine (1995). This project deals exclusively with gay and

bisexual men's experiences with public sex. Male public sex often occurs in settings where women are rarely present. However, a web of gender relations is always present. As Connell states, "Gender is a way in which social practice is ordered" (71). Even though gay and bisexual men's sexual desires are often expressed without women being present, male-male sexual interactions are governed by a gendered social order. As any gay or bisexual man can tell you, gay men are often portrayed as possessing a deficient masculinity. Their "othered" states become the marker between masculine and non-masculine. In other words, gay masculinities are treated as subordinate to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995).

Hegemonic masculinities are neither static nor stable. For Connell (1995), "hegemony ... is a historically mobile relation" (77). Women, men of color, working-class men, and gay and bisexual men repeatedly challenge hegemonic masculinity. Connell discusses that gay organizing has shifted from a politics of liberation and radical gender critique to a politics of assimilation. The political organizing of gay men's communities in the late 60s and early 70s reflected more of a sexual and gender liberation movement rather than the assimilationist tendencies of the current mobilizing. Contemporary gay men tend to ignore gender in their attempts to legitimate gay male mobilization. For Levine (1998), the dominant image of the gay male community during the late 70s and early 80s is that of the "clone." The clone's appearance embraces markers of hyper-masculinity such as jeans, construction boots, and leather jackets. However, even though the politics of gender within gay men's organizing has shifted toward one of assimilation, "Judy Garland has yet to become unpopular" (Connell 219). Gay men and gay male sexuality still

tolerate multiple expressions of masculinity from butch to high-fem, even as gay men's organizing increasingly distances itself from the radical gender critiques of the early 70s liberation politics.

For Connell, "there is ... an unavoidable politics of masculinity in and around contemporary men's homosexuality" (1995, 219). The high-fem and butch cultures that coexist within gay men's communities critique and support the contemporary gender order. For Connell, and others (Nardi 1999, Carrington 1999), the presence of gay masculinities creates an unstable opposition to hegemonic masculinity. Gay masculinities provide an ongoing challenge to the contemporary gender order. This instability is underscored in my examination of gay and bisexual men's use of public sex sites.

Public sex is theorized as anonymous and impersonal (Humphreys 1970). These constructions of public sex align it with hegemonic masculine sexuality. That is, men's sexuality is seen as instrumental and hierarchical while women's sexuality is seen as expressive and solidary (Nardi 1999). Accordingly, men should remain emotionally uninvolved during sexual encounters. Public sex is viewed as as anonymous and impersonal as sex can be; yet, men who are having sex with other men and developing relationships within these settings defy the emotionless sex standard of hegemonic masculinity. The construction of public sex as impersonal relies on the sexual standards supported by hegemonic masculinity. However, as I have argued in Chapter Four, gay and bisexual men's experiences in public sex sites can develop into friendships and romances. Also, gay and bisexual men can create emotionally intimate relationships with others in these settings, even as these

relationships remain visibly anonymous. Nardi (1999) states, “Sex between friends illustrates the complexity of reproducing hegemonic masculinity (e.g. sex without commitment) while also challenging it by invoking stereotypically nonmasculine emotions of comfort, sharing, and friendliness” (92). His words reflect my findings regarding gay and bisexual men’s sexual encounters in public sex venues.

CARING

Caring has been repeatedly recognized as a female attribute (Gilligan 1982) or as a feminine way of being and knowing (Noddings 1992). However, the participants gave examples of how they themselves cared for (and how they were cared for) the men they met while cruising a public sex locale throughout our interviews. King (1998) explores how male primary school teachers deal with the gendered construction of their work. Noddings (1984) and Nias (1989) construct teaching, especially in primary school, as an act of caring. King explores these constructions of teaching as caring and caring as feminine. He argues that male primary school teacher’s presence in the feminine setting of primary school mark them as “other.” Men who choose to work in female-dominated careers or who work in socially perceived feminine settings must deal with the consequences of not being perceived as quite a man. King suggests that “the category ‘male primary teacher’ has been so crafted that it implicitly includes negative low-prestige features, such as ‘feminine,’ ‘homosexual,’ and ‘pedophile’” (10).

While for male primary teachers charges of pedophilia and femininity remain silent, for gay and bisexual men these charges are explicit concerns. For example, my experience with the human subjects review board and their insistence that I include a

child-abuse boilerplate, demonstrate how the taint of pedophilia stains the construct of “public sex.” Gay men are often portrayed as feminine in our culture. However, their participation in public sex, as it has been historically theorized, constructs them as reckless and dangerous (masculine). Gay and bisexual men who participate in public sex are viewed as typically male, at least in their execution of their sexual desires even if their sexual aim seems amiss. Again, gay male sexuality provides an ongoing, though unstable, challenge to the contemporary gender order.

This chapter explores the ways that gay and bisexual men’s participation in public sex settings can be both impersonal *and* caring. Gay men’s reliance on hegemonic standards of masculine sexuality maintains traditional notions of public sex as emotionally detached. However, gay men challenge hegemonic standards of masculine sexuality when they engage in stereotypically nonmasculine behaviors of caring and concern. The contradictions surrounding public sex among gay and bisexual men provide another example of the unstable oppositional politics of masculinity that surround contemporary men’s homosexuality. These contradictions within gay and bisexual men’s use of public sex reveal the influence of gendered norms in single sex interactions.

PUBLIC SEX AND CARING

None of the participants talked specifically in terms of taking care of other men in public sex sites. Yet, they repeatedly gave examples of caring and concern which helped to protect the settings and the other men throughout the interviews. All of the men discussed the “unwritten rules” of public sex. When asked whether these rules also established an ethic of caring among the men, most of the participants

agreed. A few believed these were rules that just guaranteed their sexual success. A few of these “unwritten rules” were: creating a sense of privacy when engaging in sexual activities, not acknowledging each other when outside of the setting (without first looking for clues that it would be okay), not talking excessively while cruising in the setting, not attracting unwanted attention, not revealing other cruisers’ identities to others (especially to those individuals who would be judgmental), and accepting rejection quietly and quickly.

At the end of the interviews, I explicitly asked each participant whether or not the men with whom he interacted with at public sex locales had ever cared for him. I was interested in getting the men’s own interpretations and examples of what they considered caretaking among public sex cruisers. Based on responses to that question three groups emerged during the interviews. Two men stated there was “no caretaking” among men who use public sex sites. The second group, comprised of men who stated “no” or “not sure,” was less certain of their answer than the previous group. The second group consisted of six participants. The third group (n=22) were men who answered “yes” to the question.

No Caring

The two men who responded that there was ‘no caretaking’ among cruisers were Blake and C.E.O. Blake (partnered with Pierce) and C.E.O. (a facilities manager) felt that men who used PSEs were out for themselves and could care less about the other men they met while cruising. Blake and C.E.O.’s responses supported the link between hegemonic masculine sexuality and public sex. C.E.O. restricted his interactions at public sex sites to obtaining orgasms only.

Blake and Pierce, were the couple discussed in Chapter Four, had recently started a gay adult video company. Both were parents and deeply committed to safer-sex guidelines. Blake's concern for safer sex influenced his response whether men took care of each other while at public sex settings. Since he had met Pierce in a mall tearoom, his personal experience provided him with evidence suggesting that men were capable of taking care of others while cruising in public sex locales. However, Blake's responses reinforced the negative perceptions of gay men as careless and unable to establish caring relationships. His seemed to want to say something positive about public sex users, but ultimately for Blake, these men were dangerous. He said,

I regret to say that I think most of the men that go to those places could care less. They're there for one reason and that's to get off, and they're not concerned about safe sex, they're not concerned about STDs of any sort.

As rates of new infections for HIV have started to increase, gay and bisexual men have once again come under attack for their sexual behaviors. This is the first increase in HIV infection rates among gay and bisexual men since the decline of infections which occurred in the late 80s and early 90s. Throughout our interview, Blake talked about what he did and how he behaved, but did not allow his own experiences to influence how he viewed public sex and the other men who cruised these settings.

Many of Blake's friends were from a park he used to find sexual partners. During our interview, he talked about his friendships from the park and how the park was as much a social outlet for him as it was a sexual one. Also, Blake believed that there was a sense of connection among men who cruised at a public sex site. Blake started using these sites while he was married. While he was married he used

tearooms strictly as a sexual release and worried about being discovered. Today, he is more social in the settings than he was before. Blake's responses oscillated during our interview. He described his behavior and his friends' behaviors as friendly, social, and having a feeling of connection while describing the behavior of the men he did not know as irresponsible, detached, and strictly sexual.

For example, after our interview, I revealed that I was moving to the city where he lived and wanted to live in his neighborhood. He spent about ten minutes talking to me about which streets to avoid and what was nice about living in his neighborhood. I had met him because of his interest in helping me with my research. He recruited his partner, Pierce, for my study. Now, I see him in the park nearly every week. Most of the time, when we talk, Blake inquires about the progress of my research and he offers encouragement reminding me how much he enjoyed being interviewed. Yet, he believed that he and Pierce (and their friends) were different from other men who used parks, tearooms, and other such places. Blake and his friends were the exceptions not the norm. Blake thought of public sex as an irresponsible and harmful act which perhaps revealed more of his own history of public sex as a married man than how he actually uses these settings now since his relationship with Pierce. Now, Blake uses the park as a social venue and a place for model recruiting for his video company. For him, the park is less compartmentalized and his public sex cruising is not hidden as before. His shifting relationship with public sex illuminates the contradictions he has in his understanding of the men who engage in public sex.

C.E.O. showed up at my apartment wearing a jacket and tie. He had just gotten off work. He was the picture of white middle-class professionalism. I found that he was more consistent in his answers than Blake. He used the same park as Blake to cruise for sex. He also used the park to socialize with his friends, but never mixed both activities. When he was cruising for sex, he was cruising for sex. If he ran into a friend while cruising in the park, they would nod and then go their separate ways. In response to my question regarding caretaking, he answered,

I don't think I know of anybody that – I don't feel that [men take care of each other]. I mean when you're in those areas, you're out there for you; it's all about your needs, your wants, your desires.

He has been using public sex settings for more than 15 years and once a man told him about police arresting in the park. C.E.O. did not consider this an act of concern, love, or friendship, rather “it was just notification.” C.E.O. had several friends who also used PSEs and they knew of each other's use. While they shared information with each other about what was going on in the park, he did not tell strangers in the park this information. He was very private about his public sex behavior and only shared it with his other friends who also used these settings. He disagreed with me in that when he followed the norms of public sex, such as not identifying participants in other settings, he was “taking care” of someone else.

C.E.O. felt that his ability to create a sense of privacy for himself and the other men was being threatened by the police. He expressed his concern that men were being forced to be more visible. He said,

What the parks have done, and I don't know if the parks are doing this on their own or if the police are requiring it, is that they're clipping the trees in such a way that they're removing the skirts that guys used to hide under, so that now there are fewer and fewer trees that the guys can go hide under. So it's like we had these zones of privacy that somebody could walk along the trail and really not know

what was going on, even though it was just ten feet away. But now there's no place to go so you're leaving these men like very few options to go create some privacy, and so they're kind of like forcing them to like be much more visible.

He also discussed the timing of the automated sprinkler system, the placement of "No Parking" signs along known "cruising spots" on the park's circular drive, the lighting of the park, and the placement of the playground. The playground had been added a few years back. Another participants who had been cruising in the park for many years told me that the playground was placed in an area that had been a very cruisy part of the park. C.E.O. and this participant believed that the playground's placement served the police department's strategies for increasing surveillance of gay and bisexual men in the park.

As one of two who believed that caretaking did not occur among men who use public sex sites, C.E.O. was also one out of three who discussed how eliminating the men's ability to create privacy forced men to be more visible and put themselves at greater risk for arrest. While C.E.O. did not think of himself as being concerned for the other men who use public sex settings, he provided examples of how he followed the rules to ensure that everyone would be protected from exposure and the setting would remain available. In C.E.O.'s mind he needed the other men to keep coming back so that there would be other men for him to meet.

The contradictions between C.E.O.'s participation in public sex and how he discusses his experiences reflect the inadequacies of how public sex is theorized with regards to how gay and bisexual men actually experience public sex. C.E.O. discussed public sex as being about his needs and desires, but he did not think of the men servicing him as taking care of his needs and desires. Each man was doing

exactly what he wanted with little regard for their partner's desires. He did not discuss his concern about other men's arrests, yet his use of language implied a communal "we" while separating himself from the other men. When he talked about the other men in the park separately, his concern that these men were being forced into more vulnerable positions by police activities was revealed. C.E.O.'s language reveals how he cares about these men. He is able to care about the men's risk of arrest but does not engage in any behavior that might be construed as caretaking. He was able to ignore the irony between his thinking about public sex and his actual experiences.

Blake and C.E.O. represented the aspects of gay men's organizing that reinforced hegemonic masculinity. They used impersonal models of public sex cruising to interpret their experiences. Hence, they were able to ignore those experiences that contradicted the model's explanatory power. Blake and C.E.O.'s interpretations of their behaviors were typical of older theoretical explanations. They were looking out for their own needs and desires. The men that took care of Blake or C.E.O.'s sexual needs were constructed as meeting their own desires, selfishly getting their sexual kicks. These men were not viewed as helping someone else because they were having sex in a public setting. Men taking care of themselves and being emotionally detached during sex reflect hegemonic ideals of masculinity. They also reduce public sex to an anonymous, selfish, impersonal, and quick sexual orgasm, instead of reflecting the nuances of public sexual expression among gay and bisexual men.

Ambiguity about Caring

For six of the participants, an ambiguity surfaced during their interviews. Their responses of “no” or “not sure” revealed less certainty, and the responses for those men who experienced ambiguity about caring were less consistent and their examples were more specific than the first group. These men reflected more on who was in the park and which setting was involved. Several of the men were unwilling to say that men took care of each other from these settings, but did sense something between themselves and the other men they met while cruising. Several stated that while there was a sense of responsibility among cruisers for each other, it was selfishly motivated. One man stated that people took care of each other in general and that men who use public sex settings were no more likely to take care of each other than people in any other similar situation; a group of familiar strangers in a common area. Some respondents felt that there was a sense of caretaking among men in these settings, but they did not want to state it too strongly. The respondents ranged from being completely out as gay, to being a closeted bisexual man. Their experience varied from decades of cruising public sex locales to just a few months cruising only one or two sites. Some of these men used the settings for sexual opportunities only and some befriended the men they met while cruising for sex.

Miles (the attorney) and James (the self-employed artist and masseur) both discussed men who were uncertain or uncomfortable about their male-male sexual behaviors and how that affected caretaking in a given setting. Miles felt that he and other men who were comfortable with their sexuality were more likely to engage in activities that indicated their concern for others. He described that,

Sometimes it's even just when it's all over with, part of what you say when you're saying goodbye is 'be careful' or 'take care' or something like that, so it's kind of minimal, but that at least shows that the feeling is there.

Miles believed that those men who were not concerned about others were men who were uncomfortable about their sexual behavior. Those men were reckless and threatened the safety of the other men because "they're either not sure what they want or afraid of what they want or angry because of what they want." Miles believed that these men were "not very common" in the settings. James explicitly discussed the difference between gay men and straight-identified men's use of public sex sites. He believed that gay men were able to develop a "continuity" that incorporated their public sex with other aspects of their lives. Straight-identified men, whom he believed made up the majority of public sex cruisers, were "coming from an [oppressed state of mind] and when you're coming from an oppression it is about release...I don't think that they're taking care of anybody but their own needs." Both men talked about 'straight' men; however James believed they were the majority of public sex cruisers while Miles believed they were in the minority. This could be due to the type of man they were attracted to and depended on which site they frequented. During the interviews, it was common for two men to provide contradictory information even though they were talking about the same site. I believed this revealed more about what type of man the participant was interested in rather than who was actually in the specific setting.

James and Miles also discussed the presence of sexually transmitted diseases and whether or not men were spreading HIV in these locales. James felt gay men were not spreading HIV. He believed it was the straight-identified men who were

responsible for transmission of the virus in these settings. Miles made no such distinction but talked about his personal experiences in which he often discussed condom availability and how condoms affected what type of sex he and his partners engaged in. Both men stated that gay men were concerned about protecting others' health.

Jimbo had been cruising the park near his home for only a few months. His reflections in regard to the caretaking question captured the feeling of many in this group. They stated that there was "no sense of caretaking" or they had no opinion one way or the other. Then the participants shifted their view point as they talked about their interactions. Jimbo said,

I don't have an opinion in any specific direction. I definitely don't view the men there as being irresponsible or uncaring. But I also don't see men going out of their way to connect with the [others in a caring way].

(pause)

But I don't know, because at the end of an encounter, there does seem to be like a kind of connection there, like an intention of like taking care of somebody like in verbally, verbalizing an acknowledgement of gratitude or something like that, so when I think about it that way, it does seem to me that there's some caring involved to some extent, like if it wasn't, you'd just run and walk away. But there's like some kind of a connection either verbally or eye to eye, like that. I never even looked at it [before this interview].

Except in how they negotiated sex, several men had not thought about the ways they interacted while cruising for public sex. When asked about caring among public sex cruisers, they ventured no opinion. However, upon reflection, they noticed how caring affected their interactions. They simply followed norms about how to interact in the locale and outside of the setting if they happened to run into someone. They did not analyze it. They just did what they did. The men they met while cruising were strangers and taking care of strangers seemed odd. However, as they discussed

their security in these settings with strangers who might know someone they knew, they talked about how they felt protected from exposure because of the trust among cruisers.

Darren (a singing waiter) who frequented bathhouses and the park felt that there was no caretaking exercised while he cruised. However, he was one of two participants to recognize that the purpose of public sex was to take care of your sexual needs. Thus, by engaging in consensual sex the cruisers were agreeing to take care of each other's sexual needs. Prior to the interview, Darren had not considered taking care of sexual needs important enough to be considered relevant to the caretaking question. He was not alone. In her seminal essay, Rubin (1984) identifies society's view of sexuality as inherently destructive and she promotes a radical theory of sexuality. In a society that views sexuality as bad, the ideas presented here that one's sexual needs met outside of a committed monogamous relationship can be seen as a possible act of caring is rarely acceptable.

Caring

My research found several examples demonstrating that gay and bisexual men were creating outcomes that were often unacknowledged in the previous research in this area. The men that made up this group believed that they, and the other men they met and saw in public sex sites, were concerned about each other's privacy, trust, pleasure, and comfort. The traditional model of public sex portrays the sexual interactions as homogeneous – just sexual. The reality of gay and bisexual men's sexual interactions in public sex settings vary widely across the specific setting, their age, their proximity to settings, their relationship status, and their reasons for going.

Thus, allowing far more experiences than those previously presented (Humphreys 1970; Karlen 1971; Saghir and Robbins 1973; Desroches 1990). The participants provided examples of men who engaged in brief exchanges of kindness, concern, and care. They discussed other examples of concern and caretaking among each other that extended beyond the boundaries of the setting. These men ($n = 22$) created something more than just orgasm while they cruised for public sex. In order to demonstrate how even “impersonal” sexual exchanges encompassed an ethic of caring, I do not discuss the friendships, dates, and romantic relationships that emerged from these settings. Although, I do recognize them as examples of caring that challenge hegemonic masculinities and traditional theorizing about public sex, I found that caring existed between the participants and the men, even those interactions that remained part of the “anonymous” landscape of public sex.

I identified and created four broad categories from the participants’ comments. The first grouping of caring behaviors mentioned by participants involved helping others by providing material goods or knowledge. The second grouping of caring behaviors mentioned by the men concerned cruisers’ acknowledgement of potential risks for sexually transmitted infections, mostly HIV. The third type of caring was gossip, or sharing information about police raids and the other men in the settings. The men engaged in self-policing activity by sharing information with each other. They ensured the privacy and participation of other participants and the existence of the settings. How the men were emotionally supported in their interactions in public sex settings was the fourth type of caring that occurred among men who use public sex locales.

Providing Material Goods or Knowledge

Randy, whose experience with the “hippie couple” was discussed in Chapter Four, talked about another experience he had as he was starting graduate school. Randy picked up a man in one of the campus’s “cruising spots,” and they went back to Randy’s apartment. He had just moved to town and this was his first apartment, so he had only a few essentials. Randy described their next meeting, “I saw him again the next afternoon, he came by and brought a bunch of silverware and stuff because I didn’t have any dishes and things at my [place], I [had] just moved there.” Randy did not remember the man’s name but remembered his gifts. Randy, like most of the men interviewed, was someone who rarely recalled his public sex experiences except for erotic stimulus while masturbating. Near the end of our interview, he smiled and commented, “It’s neat having these memories tickled.” Randy continued to ask about the research after the interview and offered me encouragement with the project. His sentiments reflected many of the men’s experiences with finding someone to talk to about their public sex. They enjoyed the experience and remained friendly with their newfound confidant, reminding me of the relationships that developed among men who use public sex locales.

James (the undergraduate and sexual-health educator mentioned previously) discussed how a group of men who were becoming his friends introduced him to the baths and showed him how to use them, where everything was, and what to expect as they visited the bathhouses. These men showed James a new world and taught him the ins-and-outs of it. They also taught him how to enjoy his public sex and not be embarrassed about it. He was grateful to these friends. Several other men talked

about how their first experiences in new settings were often with someone who would introduce them to the setting and its norms of behavior, especially if the norms differed from ones they typically used.

Sexual Health Concerns

Four men talked about their experiences regarding HIV awareness among public sex patrons: Pierce (partnered with Blake), Miles (the lawyer), Mannington (the florist), and Stephen (a 36 year-old computer support technician). All four believed that men in public sex sites were more responsible than men in other settings when it came to reducing the risk of exposure to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Pierce said, "I guess it's a safe sex issue for me. To me, that's caring for the person that I'm with...he's still another human being and I have a responsibility to that person." Mannington said, "I've seen guys protect each other's HIV status. I mean and that's happened to me." He described one trick's response to him putting the trick's dick in his ass. "He's like 'Dude, come on, that's how you get AIDS. Chill out. Let me jack off in your crack.'" Mannington believed "that there's a whole lot more self-awareness, there's a whole lot more awareness of each other" among men in PSEs than men in bars. He was not the only participant to comment on this sense of self-awareness and sense of responsibility. Similarly, Stephen said, "we're (men in PSEs) all much more open to talking about what our particular boundaries around safe sex are." Only a few men mentioned concerns about safer sex. The men who mentioned safer sex felt that men in public sex settings were more likely to be aware of the responsibility towards each other than the men they met online or at a bar.

Gossip

Many of the participants provided examples of how they shared information, or gossiped, with other men in these settings. Several men talked about occasions where men would tell each other if they suspected there was a cop in the setting. They shared information with other PSE users if the police had made arrests recently. One participant called me at home to let me know that he had seen campus police near a campus tearoom. He wanted to share the information with me so that I would pass it on, but also wanted to know if I had any information about why the campus police were there. A few days later, I found out that some university equipment had been stolen from the building. I called the participant and shared the information with him. Most of the participants had warned other cruisers if there were police officers present or if the police had recently made arrests. Additionally, the participants shared with other men at these sites whether someone was considered odd, had unusual sexual taste, or was a “sexual dud.” While the participants did not talk about feeling a sense of responsibility to other cruisers, most of the participants did share information that might protect them from exposure or arrest.

A common warning was whether another man was careless about attracting unwanted attention, therefore threatening the invisibility of the sexual activity. One of the campus tearooms had a steady base of regulars and many of the men recognized each other from around town. Last year, a new cruiser appeared at the tearoom. He quickly became known among the regular users since he often disregarded the norms of the tearoom. He would slide under stall partitions instead of kneeling. As new men would enter the tearoom, he would remain in the aisle in front

of the toilet stalls, not knowing whether these men were cruising. Several of the regulars discussed the new cruiser. Some wanted the man out of the tearoom, but others wanted to teach him the behavioral standards for that tearoom. They understood his need for the tearoom and wanted him to behave appropriately, so that he and others could keep using the tearoom. This also reduced the chance of the tearoom being shut down.

Emotional Support

Other participants talked about the emotional side of these perceived impersonal physical exchanges. Pierce, Dusty, James, and Brad all shared that their interactions were emotional. These four men interacted with others in these settings as complete individuals, not just sexual beings. Pierce believed strongly that even in these anonymous settings he connected with these men in multiple ways. He said,

A lot of times you've got to think about their emotional side. And you can tell sometimes, is this person experimenting or are they really into this, and I'm not the one that's going to be breaking them in. So there's those aspects of it. There's more than just the physical sexual side of it. You've got to think of that person's emotional setting. And I call it gaydar. I can tell if this guy is really uptight and nervous, uncomfortable. He's maybe just experimenting there or probably shouldn't be there, and I respect that. And so I don't say that it's just a quick, casual thing.

Pierce's comments demonstrate how he can care for a man without even getting to know the man that he's having sex or not having sex. These acts of caring were expressed in subtle ways due to the limits placed on talking in the settings. Often, caring was expressed by saying "no" due to considering whether someone was ready or not. A former roommate told me a story about his experience with someone he thought was too young to be in the tearoom. Instead of having sex with the

individual, he took him for coffee and talked with him about his well-being and physical safety while cruising.

Dusty discussed why men used these settings and how that was important to him as he interacted with others in these settings. He believed that the men were searching for some kind of connection, some sense of belonging to others like themselves. He discussed being able to help someone find a place that allowed him to be himself in an emotionally safe place. Sitting at my table, Dusty responded,

Definitely you're being taken care of in the initial physical sense, but I think a lot of people, even though it's a physical thing that you're [seeking], it's satisfying some emotional something, call it a flaw, call it a trait, call it a hunger, it doesn't even have to be anything negative... You're giving something to someone that they're looking for. I don't think people show up there on accident. They're hunting for something. So I think it allows people to get a form of gratification that they can't find someplace else... I think a lot of people frequent the same PSEs because there's a safety factor. You do see the same people, you know these people, these may be the only people that they connect with that know what they're about that no one else knows about. So, they're getting a sense of community... a comfortable place, a safe place.

Dusty, who did not befriend the men he meets cruising, still treated them with sensitivity and recognized the multiple reasons for why men use public sex sites. His reflections demonstrated the way that men in public sex settings became familiar with each other, as well as the sense of responsibility that existed among them; especially for men who frequented the same setting on a regular basis and at the same time.

James contracted HIV a few years after our interview. He told me about how one of the men from the group that had taken him to the baths for a night out was one of the first individuals he told. They had become close friends through going to the baths together. They even became roommates while James was between boyfriends. He needed this man's emotional support as he dealt with his HIV-positive status.

Brad talked about how important the emotional connection was for him as he sought sex in bathhouses. Brad discussed what it meant to him to be able to be himself, a gay man who enjoyed sex with other gay men. Brad contacted me through my online screen name. We met at his home after dinner. He answered the door and asked me to forgive the mess. He, his partner, and their housemate were selling their house and they were in the middle of packing. I asked if we needed to reschedule and he smiled shaking his head telling me he needed a break. Everyone came to meet me in order to check me out. Brad told me that earlier during dinner one of them asked if I was gay. Brad realized that he did not know and became a little concerned. As were the other members of the household, he was relieved to find out that I was indeed gay. He was unprepared to talk about his public sex with a straight man and said he would not have been so talkative had I not been gay. As the rest of the household was busy packing, Brad and I sat down on the sun porch to talk.

Brad grew up in small rural town and lived in a devoutly Christian family that did not tolerate anything but the strictest interpretation of the Bible. Of all the men I interviewed, Brad's experiences touched me the most. Not only did he find emotional comfort in bathhouses, he found divine comfort. Here is how Brad answered the question:

But from the very first of my bathhouse experiences, [they] became a haven for me. I was so involved in church life, I was a full time church music director at a fundamentalist church, and my dad was a fundamentalist pastor and I was, my full time job was a missionary that worked with all the fundamentalist churches in a five county region, so I was extremely surrounded by fundamental Christianity when I came out, and the bathhouse was the only place where I knew I could go where it was members only. It was like if they are there, then they've got the same problem you do. Nobody there could really be a threat to me, where the rest of my world was totally unsafe for gay men, but that one place when I would just get to the point where I just didn't think I could take this anymore, I'd run to the

bathhouse and I would stay at a bathhouse maybe twelve hours at a time just because it was a safe place and I could just let my hair down and not have to worry that anybody there would know I was gay and it wasn't a big deal and sometimes I really needed that space. And I guess I kind of took it personally when AIDS came along and they started talking about closing the bathhouses down, that was an extreme threat for me because that was like taking the only safe place I had away from me... So I had a real hard time with that and I was very thankful they didn't close the bathhouses in Colorado. That was an extremely big deal for me. I would have probably moved from Colorado if they had closed the bathhouses, that's how important it was for me. Of course, I would have had to find a way for God to call me from somewhere else. (Laughing)

Brad found sanctuary among strangers in a bathhouse. The nameless men that held him, kissed him, had sex with him, comforted him, and talked with him offered the acceptance that he could not find within his family. Now, Brad is "out" and does not use public sex sites as often as he did when he was younger. His need for the sanctuary of public sex is no longer as present as when he lived with his family of origin. He fondly recalled his visits to the baths when he was younger and was grateful that public sex locales existed.

Pierce, Dusty, James, and Brad recognized that the sexual exchange that occurred in a public sex setting required an awareness of the other individual's needs and concerns. They believed that there was still the opportunity to affect someone else's day, even as men engaged in "anonymous" sex. A brief mutual masturbation or blowjob between strangers in a bathroom or park provided a setting for men to come together and forge a sense of concern and responsibility for the other individual. Sociological theorizing concerning public sex promotes a limited understanding that portrays these men as dangerously selfish. My research revealed how the experiences discussed during interviews offer added insight into the social implications of meeting a stranger for a quick sexual release in a hostile world. The participants' experiences exposed alternative reasons why gay and bisexual men

sought out these exchanges with the threat of legal prosecution and social persecution.

CONCLUSION

The assumptions of anonymity and impersonality continue to construct public sex as an emotionless bastion of hegemonic masculine sexuality. These assumptions exist even as the men care for one another. Connell (1995) states that contemporary male homosexuality has produced an unstable oppositional masculinity politics. Several authors have explored how gays and lesbians continually interact with hegemonic ideals of gender in their everyday lives. Nardi (1999) discusses the contradictory aspect of gay men's friendships in regards to hegemonic masculinities. He notes that gay men's friendships are opportunities for restructuring masculinity because friendships provide emotional intimacy. Gay men having sex with friends would combine sex with emotions, thus challenging hegemonic masculinity. However, gay men's perpetuation of the myth that sex will destroy friendships suggests that gay men have organized their friendships according to the sex-without-emotion standard of hegemonic masculinity. Carrington (1999) observes a similar outcome among "lesbigay" families. The existence of these families' challenge hegemonic masculinity and femininity, yet these families often rely on hegemonic masculinity and femininity when discussing the division of household labor.

Gay and bisexual men's use of public sex sites, and their ability to create an ethic of caring with the men who remain anonymous, supports Connell's understanding of contemporary gay men's experiences of gender. Gay men are feminized in this culture. As feminized men, gay masculinities create an oppositional politics of masculinity. Public sex is constructed as instrumental, hierarchical, and emotionless. Gay men who engage in public sex create dynamic relationships that defy the image of emotionless, impersonal sex, yet they also use these settings for that quick, "no-strings attached" sex. Gay and bisexual men's creation of caring relationships with men, who may or may not remain anonymous in public sex settings, complicates the politics of masculinity. Gay men continue to challenge hegemonic masculinities even while they, at times, support it. Meanwhile, the meaning of public sex is destabilized as gay and bisexual men create caring relationships with friends as well as anonymous tricks.

CHAPTER 6

"IMAGINED COMMUNITITES" AND PUBLIC SEX

The explanations of public sex among men reflect gay and bisexual men's ongoing reliance on and resistance of hegemonic ideals about sex, love, friendship, and intimacy. As gay and bisexual men's visibility has increased in geographical, political, and cultural spaces, the explanations for public sex have shifted to reflect gay and bisexual men's ability to speak for themselves. Public sex was originally explained as a psychologically and morally inferior sexual pursuit (Seidman 1991), much like same-sex sexualities were conceptualized at the beginning of the twentieth century (Terry 1999). As gay men became more visible and assertive politically and culturally, the explanations for public sex have shifted from individual flaws to societal ones.

Early descriptions of the homosexual male portrayed him as a self-hating individual who was unable to establish truly intimate relationships, which resulted in his use of public sex locales. Terry (1995, 1999) discusses the medical construction of the homosexual, male and female, as a pathological being. She says,

Much of the popular reporting about sex crimes reinforced an existing notion that homosexuals were, by definition, child molesters. This idea was abetted by the common assumption that homosexuals were trapped at an arrested stage in development which led them to prey upon innocent children to satisfy their perverse desires (1999, 272).

The explanation changed as gay and bisexual men were able to claim more authority for their experience. The cause of public sex shifted from the internalized self-hatred of the homosexual to his response to the oppressive nature of society's intolerance towards male-male sexuality (Seidman 1991; Lieshout 1997). As gay men

increasingly struggled to self-define their communities, identities, and pleasures, explanations for the presence of public sex in gay men's communities shifted towards a self-fulfillment, sexual liberation model of community building. As Seidman states, "Discourses and representations appeared that imbued casual sex with social importance related to promoting individual happiness, social liberation and social solidarity" (185). While Seidman uses the term "casual sex," his definition overlaps with this paper's definition of public sex. Seidman argues that the community-building aspect of male-male casual sex was unique to gay male subcultures during the Seventies. Heterosexual and lesbian conceptions of casual sex did not contain this idea of social solidarity through sex. Within gay male communities a tension continues to exist between those who embrace the sexual liberation and social solidarity model of casual sex and those who do not.

In this chapter, I advance the theories of public sex as a community building strategy. While the extant literature links public sex with the creation of contemporary gay men's communities (Chauncey 1994; Seidman 1991), I suggest that gay and bisexual men who engage in public sex are generating a different sense of community with the men they meet *in these settings*. This sense of community is based on their shared sexual activities and settings. It is distinct from their connection to the LGBT communities. Thus, within contemporary gay men's communities there is a unique communal experience for men who cruise public sex sites. I incorporate Anderson's (1991) idea of an imagined community from his conceptualization of nationalism to discuss the men's experiences of community with other public sex cruisers.

First, I link Anderson's idea of "imagined communities" with contemporary queer discourses that examine the intersections of sexuality, spatiality, identity, and community. Next, I discuss the participants' comments about public sex cruisers as constituting a community, or experiencing a sense of community with others from those settings. Similar to their responses regarding caring among public sex cruisers discussed in Chapter Five, I grouped the men into three broad categories based on their responses. First, the "no community" group (n = 4, 13.3%) reiterated traditional notions of public sex being anonymous and impersonal; therefore, community could not exist under such conditions. This group of participants was primarily men of color. The implication of the racial/ethnic composition of public sex sites and the men's of color rejection of a sense of community suggest that men of color may experience public sex differently than white men. Second, the "uncertain community" group (n = 6, 20%) discussed how the specifics of who was in the setting and which type of setting was used, affected the creation of a sense of community. The men in this group agreed that something happened among public sex cruisers but were hesitant to label it community. Last, the "community" group (n = 20, 66.7%) stated clearly that there existed a sense of community among public sex cruisers that was separate from their participation or identification with the larger LGBT communities.

"IMAGINED COMMUNITIES" AND QUEER THEORY

Scholars and activists are currently critiquing community and identity, once considered terms that equally represented everyone, as internal differences within communities reveal the limited capacity of these terms to include everyone.

Lesbians, queers of color, and working-class individuals have revealed the exclusionary tendencies of how a "gay" identity and community tend to support the concerns of middle-class, white men (Davis 1995). Community, as a term, remains contested, and, therefore, it is conceptualized in multiple ways. Murray (1979) and Levine (1979) produce conceptions of gay communities that are similar to models of ethnic-minority communities. The authors explore the geographical territories occupied by gays and lesbians and discuss the institutional infrastructures available to meet the needs of the people within gay and lesbian neighborhoods. Davis (1995) briefly outlines the theoretical shifts that occurred in gay studies in the U. S. over the past thirty years. In the 70s, "'community' was conceptualized as a quasi-ethnic minority in which the politics of space are largely dependent upon the economic and social control of an individual neighborhood," (286) states Davis. Murray and Levine map gay neighborhoods, recording the political organizing of gay territories. Their work documents the growing political and cultural presence of gay neighborhoods in contemporary urban life. In the late 80s and early 90s, the "quasi-ethnic minority" model of community was critiqued. The "quasi-ethnic minority" model was viewed as an acceptance of essentialistic understandings of queer identities, needs, and territories that rendered other community members -- for example, sex radicals, people of color, and working-class gays and lesbians -- invisible. The new studies challenge the older "methodologies that relied on inflexible notions of identity [and] did little to investigate culture" (Davis 286, 87). Anthologies like *Mapping Desire* and *Queers in Space* introduce scholarly work that incorporates flexible notions of identity and how culture shapes notions of space and community. Scholarship

investigating community increasingly recognizes culture as affecting individuals' experiences.

Community building can be compared to nation building. In this sense, I use Anderson's (1991) conception of nation to explore how gay and bisexual men who use public sex settings create a sense of community with one another. Anderson defines the nation as an "imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6). The nation differs from the state in its function. As Boyd (1997) states, "The nation ... emerged as the state's cultural artifact and constant companion" (135). As the cultural artifact of the state, the nation commands "profound emotional legitimacy" (Anderson, 4). The nation as community "is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 7). Nationalism is "imagined" because its members "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). Anderson's definition of nationalism as an imagined community provides an excellent foundation to discuss the experience of community that gay and bisexual men experience with others who also cruise public sex sites.

Anderson (1991) situates the emergence of nationalism at the end of the eighteenth century. He outlines the role of the print media in the production of nationalism in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The printed word allowed people who would never meet or know each other to share a common purpose and sense of being united. Once created, nationalism, "became 'modular,' capable of being transplanted ... to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations" (4).

While Anderson discusses nationalism in regard to political states, his conceptualization of nationalism is useful for understanding the community of public sex cruisers. In the past few years, public sex cruisers have witnessed the production of a magazine dedicated to public sex, *Steam* by Scott O'Hara, and a web site, cruisingforsex.com. Also, O'Hara's (1999) writings about his life, many of which dealt with public sex, were published posthumously. Public sex cruisers use print media and internet sites to find cruising sites around the globe, to meet others like themselves, learn the etiquette of cruising, and to talk with one another. *Steam* and cruisingforsex.com help to maintain an "imagined community" among these men. The emergence of nationalistic discourse that surrounds same-sex desire, identity, and behavior in the late 80s and early 90s provides examples of Anderson's idea of nationalism being applied "to a great variety of social terrains."

Boyd (1997) states that the language of nationalism reflects, reinforces, and reinvigorates the state, but it can also serve to resist and restructure the state. Boyd examines the complications of creating lesbian nationalism at a time when transsexuals began to reclaim images previously used by lesbians. In the 1990s, transsexuals began to claim historical images of women who passed as men as precursors to the modern female-to-male (FTM) transsexual. Lesbians had previously used these images to establish a history of female-female sexuality. Boyd's work explores the internal differences of the "gay community" as she investigates the "border wars" between lesbians and transsexuals. In her essay, she uses the tensions between lesbian nationalism and transsexual identity formation to interrogate the role of the body in creating nationalism.

Boyd employs Butler's (1993) idea of abjection to discuss how the state can be reorganized when bodies are "queered." Butler defines abjection as meaning "cast off, away, or out and, hence, presupposes and produces a domain of agency from which it is differentiated" (243). So, abjection has the ability to constitute an outlaw subject. Abject bodies, those bodies that do not matter, such as transsexual bodies that do not reestablish maleness or femaleness, "reclaim a fleeting moment of social and cultural unintelligibility, inhabiting a queer space" (148). Within this queer space abject subjects reorder, restructure, and threaten the power structures that have cast them out. While Boyd explores the role of the body as cultural artifact in building community, this chapter explores public sex among men as generating an abject sense of community. Gay and bisexual men using public sex sites inhabit a queer space. In other words, they remain external to heteronormative sexuality and, thus, external to conventional notions of community.

Diehl (2000) argues that "tearoom sex provides a useful model for building and sustaining 'strategic collectives'" (108). I extend Diehl's argument to potentially include all public sex sites. Diehl uses "strategic collective ... to imply a community (of sorts), one which is built upon the foundation of radical sexual practice and which uses the foundation as a springboard for mobilizing political responses to puritanical and prohibitive paradigms of sexual normality" (108). Men who engage in public sex reveal the sexual politics of public spaces. The men's sexual presence in public remains queered or abject from heterosexual society and mainstream gay and lesbian society. Their abject state disrupts heteronormative assumptions about public space. Public sex disrupts public space differently than the mere presence of gays and

lesbians. A gay man in public confronts societal expectations that assume all individuals are heterosexual based on his enactment of masculinity, not homosexuality; a man having sex with another man places the sexual use of bodies in the center of that challenge. In this instance, sexuality is what is being disrupted, not the perceived sexual identity based on gendered expectations. Diehl states,

I am suggesting for those participants for whom acts are always and only underscored by an awareness of their consequences, for whom the choice to engage in tearoom trade is a deliberate and conscious reaction to maniacally repressive regimes which police sexual expression, articulate through their behaviors in tearooms strategies and courses of action which gay men and lesbians can use to combat similar instances of homophobia in other cultural arenas (108).

Public sex provides instances of resistance that can inform other LGBT organizing. Diehl explores the spaces that gay men use and occupy to explore generational experiences of the body, sexuality, space, and homelessness. Boyd (1997) uses bodies to discuss the ways that lesbians and transsexuals experience the tensions that exist between borders. Both authors use cultural artifacts to explore experiences of identity and community building that occurs under oppressive conditions.

PUBLIC SEX AND COMMUNITY

“Gay/lesbian/bisexual politics in America is at a strategic and philosophical crossroads,” states Davis (1995, 284). Critiques of identity explicitly and implicitly critique “community.” People of color (Muñoz 1999) and white lesbians (Phelan 1989) suggest alternatives for queer organizing and theorizing. Muñoz and Phelan promote an expansive and fluid definition of community while not erasing it. Currently, the term “community” is used in many ways. The definition of community for the participants fluctuated from a geographical neighborhood (similar to the quasi-

ethnic minority social geographies of 70s and 80s gay and lesbian life) to the cultural, emotional responses of, in Anderson's words, "a deep, horizontal comradeship" (1991, 7).

No Community, Just Sex

Once again, I placed the thirty participants interviewed in categories based on their responses during the interviews. Four men in this group responded "no" when I asked them if they had ever experienced a sense of community with other men who used public sex sites. Similar to the participants in the "No Caring" category in Chapter Five, these four men also provided evidence that contradicted their answers. I placed the men in this group to more clearly demonstrate the effects of "anonymous and impersonal" public sex upon individual conceptions of public sex. The assumptions of anonymity and impersonality continue to influence James, George, Jerrod, and Robert's understanding and conceptualization of public sex settings even as their personal experiences suggest other possibilities.

James (47, Asian American, and gay) responded, "I don't think of it as a community per se. I think of it as a deepening in some cases of some friendship and there's a shared experience." He viewed "community as more of a social structure." James's understanding of community as having some form of social infrastructure was common among the men in this group. For example, George (31, White, and gay) defined community in this manner, "it's like your local neighborhood community." Jerrod stated that seeing the men from PSEs out of the setting and sneaking a smile at each other was "kinda cool." He compared that feeling to the feeling he gets from visiting his fraternity's houses when he travels. I asked him if he

drew any parallels between his fraternity brothers and his tricks from restrooms. He responded, "I don't think so. I would have no clue where to go down in the city ... I have no clue if there's any [other] restrooms where people ever cruise." Jerrod needed to be able to identify other cruising sites in order to think of his tricks from the restroom as any type of community. All of the men in this group treat "community" as the geographical space where one lives and the institutional infrastructures that serve the people who live in that neighborhood. These men think of community as those "quasi-ethnic minority" centers suggested by the work of Murray (1979) and Levine (1979) that have recently been critiqued (Davis 1995). Since men who use public sex locales may not live in the same general area, and public sex sites do not have institutional frameworks, these participants did not experience a sense of community.

Only James of this group acknowledge having friendships with men he meets in public sex settings. George, Robert, and Jerrod do not develop friendships with the other men from public sex sites. However, George and Robert met their current lovers/partners in these places. Robert (35, Hispanic, and gay) reiterated the traditional assumptions about public sex when he said, "A lot of men don't want to be known as a person who goes to a place like that for sex. They don't want to be thought of as desperate or they can't get laid." Robert prefers straight-identified men and he believes "they just want a warm, wet place to put it. And, that's what they get when they go there." Jerrod's comments offer support to Robert's claims about the "straight" men Robert seeks out. Jerrod was a 22-year old closeted bisexual who self-identified as Hispanic. He said, "I go to places like this because I don't want to feel a

connection to people there. I don't want to have relationships with them. I don't want them to call me." Robert's remarks reveal two aspects of public sex that public sex cruisers deal with each time they use a setting. First, these men must deal with the negative perception of not being able to "get laid" and not being a regular gay guy. Second, straight-identified men must deal with identity-behavior incongruencies. Gay and bisexual men negotiate the negative judgements that are implied in their use of public toilets and bathhouses. Often these judgements against gay and bisexual men are masked as concerns for public health and community responsibility (Colter 1996). Straight-identified men negotiate the identity conflicts presented by their behavior.

Of the four that comprised this group three were men of color: two Hispanic men and one Asian American man. While their comments are unique to their experience and my sampling methods do not allow generalizations from these findings, the racial/ethnic composition of this group suggest different experiences for gay and bisexual men of color. While he was not a member of this group, only one of the participants commented on public sex settings that tended to draw a user base that was predominantly men of color. He was a queer Latino youth activist and actively observed the racial/ethnic composition of the spaces where he worked and socialized. The other participants did not mention race or ethnicity unless I asked specific questions about the men who frequented the public sex sites they preferred. Racially speaking, nearly all of the sites mentioned during the interviews were treated as standard, non-specific public sex settings. I interpreted public sex sites where the other men's races were not mentioned to mean predominantly "white." Frankenberg

(1993) states whiteness is usually unmarked and unnamed. I do not intend to suggest that public sex sites are this clearly segregated. When asked, all participants discussed the presence of men of color in the settings they use. However, the participants did not consider the presence of men of color in the locales to be large enough to consider that particular setting as one catering to men of color.

The experiences of the men of color in this group reflect the uneven access to “community” identification or the rejection of such identification for people of color. The participants’ experiences may reflect those critiques of mainstream gay and lesbian organizing by queers of color. Community may not mean the same thing across racial/ethnic lines. Community may not even be the best term to articulate the experiences of people of color. These critiques and the participants’ responses draw attention to the erasure and/or censure of the lives of queers of color in mainstream gay and lesbian organizing and theorizing.

Uncertain Community

The six men in this group were ambivalent about labeling what occurred among public sex cruisers as community. They believed that whether a sense of community developed or not among public sex cruisers depended on many different factors. The type of setting involved, the part of the country the setting was in, and how the men felt about their public sex activities were important factors that determined a sense of community occurring. All of the men were professionals and identified as gay. All of the men identified as white except for Alex who identified as Latino. While Alex was the youngest participant interviewed, he had the most

politicized racial/ethnic identity of the thirty respondents. The length of use of public sex settings among these six men ranged from eight to thirty-eight years.

Corky, Alex, and Alex P. thought that some type of connection existed among public sex cruisers but that it was not strong enough to be labeled “community.” As Alex P. said, “the connection is really truncated and ... only about sex.” Later, however, he clarified that he had “experienced some exceptions” to this. Alex P. met his first lover in a bathhouse and, currently, his best friend is someone he met while in an adult bookstore. Corky said,

When I first started going, I think I was interested in [community], but sensed that that was not the purpose of that and I saw the value of having a place where you could be guaranteed a sexual experience that was somewhat anonymous. ... But there definitely have been experiences within the PSEs where you could feel a strong connection with someone while it's happening.

Corky seldom talks with others about his public sex and fears that he may be sexually addicted. He struggled with his coming-out process and his sexuality. His shame and embarrassment about his public sex prevent him from identifying with other men who engage in public sex. He views himself as not-quite okay because of his behavior. He appears to be reluctant to embrace an identity that would further marginalize him.

Mark first started using public sex sites in New York City, thirty-eight years ago. He believed that New York City is more liberal than where he currently lives. He said, “New Yorkers are far more sexually active and casual sex is far more okay.” He and his partner take trips to New York. He described the street in front of the hotel as being very cruisy. He provided an example of how cruisy, “The day we were leaving, we’re packed and waiting for the car to come pick us up, Tom was downstairs and he comes back up with a trick and we had a three-way.” Mark

believed that due to the more liberal attitude about casual sex and the street cruising available in New York a sense of community occurred there but not necessarily back home. He “only mildly agreed” that community existed among men back home. He said, “there’s a connection of us being out gay men ... I think it’s normal to see public sexual behavior as one part of what our lives are like.” So, for Mark public sex was part of being involved with the larger gay male communities. It was not something unique but just another aspect of being gay men.

John considered some of the settings that were discussed during the interviews as “truly public” sex sites and others as public sex sites. The truly public sites were parks, bathrooms, and rest areas and he “personally never experienced a great deal of camaraderie or social connection at those places.” For John, he used the “truly” public sex areas because when he was younger “it was the only venue that I knew of at that time in that area.” He started using “the baths and adult bookstores” because he “didn’t have to worry about the whole arrest thing,” “could be much more relaxed,” and “much more social.” John believed that when men did not have to worry about arrest and could just hang out, a sense of community developed among the men. He believed the men who chose to go to a bathhouse instead of a restroom were going in order to be a part of something that acknowledged them and their desires, not just to have a sexual outlet. John thought that men wanting more than just sex went to the settings that offered more than sex. He believed that men knew which settings would meet their specific needs for that encounter. So, if a man wanted just a quick sexual exchange he would seek out a site that would provide one. If a man wanted to have sex and socialize, he would seek out a site where he could do both.

David thought that community could develop but it depended on each man's comfort level. David answered,

For me, I see where you can say 'Yes, it creates a sense of community between men who do this.' But I think also for many men, it's very alienating because they're ashamed that they do it, they're ashamed that they've been seen doing it by someone, thus you end up with people who when they see you on the street or when they see you out with their regular group of friends, even though you may say hello and talk to each other in the public sex environment, when it gets out of that environment, it's very, it's like very walled off and they don't want to talk with you, they don't want to say hi, they don't want to even really acknowledge that they know you.

He believed that most of the men he meets in these environments tend to be ashamed of the fact that they go. However, for David personally, if he does something with someone he wants to know something about that person. He seeks out some sort of connection with the men he meets and "does something with." Alex (the 22-year-old) agreed with David's sentiment that it depended on the man. Alex discussed "community" meaning different things to different people. Alex thought community was based on supportive, strong emotional bonds and not just sharing a common interest. In regards to experiencing a sense of community with other men in these settings Alex said, "It probably won't happen for me, but I know that that's out there and I know that that's happened and when men can support themselves like that, I think that's really beautiful." Later he added that he participates in community but that it was a mild expression of community. He said,

I think that loosely, yes, there's a community because we notify each other on the web about new spaces, we tell each other whether or not there have been raids. I've been told before whether or not there's an unsafe person there to play with. I've met some people that actually bring condoms for other people to use or leave condoms and lube and information there.

Alex believed that "you wouldn't just do that if you didn't care at all ... if you didn't have any sort of connection with the people you're having sex with." Alex does

participate in sharing information, being concerned about other men getting arrested, and sexual health issues. Alex does not create those strong emotional bonds with the men he meets in public sex venues, but since he is concerned about the other men's well-being, he considers that expression of concern as producing a sense of community, albeit mild, for him.

Mark, Alex, Corky, John, Alex P., and David considered a sense of community among men who use public sex locales as a potential, but all felt that one could not make a generalization that community always emerged in every setting with every man. They recognized that some men were ashamed of their behavior, some settings restricted the development of a connection, and that some parts of the country were less accepting of public sexual behavior. Corky, Alex P., David, and Alex discussed the ways that shame affected the men's ability to embrace their sexual behavior and ultimately themselves. For men who are embarrassed and/or ashamed of their public sex behaviors, those feelings make it difficult to recognize or identify the "deep, horizontal camaraderie" that is available in public sex locales. As John believed, public sex sites offered many possibilities and each man would use the setting that would best meet his needs. Men uncomfortable with their public sex would continue to use sites that did not provide opportunities to connect with the other men in the setting beyond their sexual interaction. Men who were comfortable with their public sex would use settings that provided a broader range of interactions. The men who comprised this section sought interactions that were mostly sexual, but acknowledged that others used public sex sites for social, emotional, and intellectual interactions, as well.

Community

The men who responded that they experienced a sense of community comprised the majority of those interviewed ($n = 20$). They discussed public sex cruisers as “pirates,” “secret brothers,” and “an underground community.” The participants viewed themselves as individuals connected with others involved in a secret, outlaw activity. Their sense of being outlaws echoes Butler’s (1993) idea of abjection, being outside of the structures of power. Diehl (2000) argues that tearoom sex is a political act, even when the individual participants do not construct their public sex experiences as consciousness raising. He states, “Public bathroom sex reveals how personal experience can (but does not necessarily) breed political involvement” (115). Among my circle of friends we joke about public sex as a means for political canvassing. I had a close friend who used to describe his bookstore trysts with straight-identified men as “unionizing” and “political organizing.” He joked about giving blowjobs to these men and then afterwards proposing to them that they vote for some gay-affirmative legislative piece. While we joked about using bookstores and restrooms to secure support for queer legislation, we also realized that the potential was there. My friends and I were already using these settings to discuss issues with the men that we knew or recognized, so it seemed obvious to discuss important issues facing gay men’s communities with the men we did not know as well. D’Emilio (1992) discusses the ways that the early founders of the Mattachine Society used the gay beaches to pass out literature and generate participants in the newly forming group. As men situated between heterosexual and mainstream gay/lesbian communities, neither of which accepts public sexual expression, they

were creating communities with each other that provided support and recognition of who they were.

Like the ineffable components of friendship (Nardi 1999), the men struggled with listing the characteristics that constituted a community for them. Tyler identified as a 28-year-old, Mexican American queer. He was a sexual health educator and viewed himself as a “pleasure activist.” His group of friends supported his view of pleasure and sexuality. His response echoed the sentiments of nearly all of the men interviewed when I asked him how public sex cruisers created community. He said, “I don’t know, I can’t really say why specifically.” Nonetheless, he was able, like most of the men, to state which experiences allowed him to have a sense of community with other men in public sex settings. A sense of community occurred for the participants through: sharing a language to negotiate an exchange; the belief in shared goals; the secret nature of their pursuits; and particularly, in the respect they had for each other.

Shared Language

James (the 25-year-old undergraduate) remembered when he first learned that men communicated in these settings without talking. He was 16 and had gone to a site that he was unaware was a public sex site. He noticed two men looking at each other and how they were able to communicate between them who would get to have sex with James. He said,

And, though no word was spoken, I understood a communication had just happened, that I had been chosen by one man, that the other man had decided to approach, and the first guy had warned him off. And I remember thinking; I know a new language. ... We have our signals and nods that we have our way of respecting each other. ... It feels like it has all of those things that a community

has, in some ways like it has more consideration and care for fellow members of the community, even than some other communities I belong to.

James described the community created by public sex cruisers in this manner, "It's a little bit like this constant group at the core that has a fluctuating periphery...but once you're a part of it, you know you could be anywhere, at any time, and there would always be a place for you." James did not know every man who cruised public sex locales but knew that he would be able to identify those individuals anywhere he traveled. James's belief that there would always be a place for him implied a much stronger connection to public sex sites and the men who used them than the term community.

Belief in Shared Goals

Brad (who discussed how bathhouses allowed him to be himself and talk with God in Chapter Five) shared another common understanding among the men in this group. He said:

I think I feel a camaraderie, even though I don't say anything to them, I know that the same type of things are going on in their heads that are going on in mine. They're there for the same reason that I am. It's a way of expressing themselves that they're comfortable with on some level. They may not be totally comfortable with it, but they're comfortable enough to be there...I have a feeling that we have something real strong in common just from the fact that we're there. So yeah, I get a sense of community.

As the experiences discussed in this manuscript have demonstrated, the men did not have identical goals. However, there existed a common belief among the participants that every man who used a public sex locale was there for the same thing, sex. The men continued to reiterate this belief throughout the interviews even after their experiences contradicted this belief about the goals of public sex. The men's

responses suggested that if any common goal existed among the men it was to protect the viability of these sites, regardless of how the individual men used them.

Diehl (2000) asks, “How do (Do?) these strategic collectives allow gay men to organize across lines of difference (generational, racial/ethnic, sexual, etc.)?” (109). Differences, racial/ethnic or otherwise, were seldom discussed during the interviews unless I specifically asked. Since the men rarely addressed the differences among men who used public sex locales, the assumption that public sex cruisers “shared the same goals” reflected the erasure of difference among these men, more so, than any actual lack of difference. However, C.E.O. defined community in this way, “[the] people are alike and have the same goals and morals. Not all those in that order or all those at once, but people that share the same common thread, be it public sex or the Rotary.” His definition implies a more fluid and expansive idea of community that would allow for differences to exist.

Miles has met two lovers in public sex settings. He met his best friend in an adult bookstore, as well. He first started cruising public sex sites during his first year of college thirty-three years ago. In his twenties, public sex sites were the gay community. He said, “For the longest time any time I met a gay person it was usually having sex with them first and then a friendship developed afterwards.” While Miles did not think public sex cruisers shared the same goals, he believed that these men were dealing with similar issues. For Miles, community was experienced “in that [the] people [who] engaged in it kinda felt like we’re all in this together.” Once again, a sense of sharing something in common provided the men with a sense of community with the other men they met while cruising a public sex locale.

Shared Secrecy

Robert met his partner in a campus tearoom. He believed that his sense of community came from being part of a secret. He strongly believed that community existed among men who used public sex sites. He said,

Yeah, I do. I definitely do. I think there's a sense of we know something that someone else doesn't know. There's this secret sort of place in society, whatever you want to call it that goes on, so there's a sense of a private, sort of like a private joke or private laugh.

James (the artist) repeated the idea that secrecy created a sense of community for him. He described public sex as "an underground community." D. B., the free-lance writer, described the men as "pirates together." These observations illustrated how the maintenance of the secret of their participation built a sense of trust with each other. James and D. B.'s comments suggested an outlaw status to their public sex pursuits. D. B.'s comment implied the playfulness that several of the men acknowledged as a reason for why they enjoyed public sex settings. While for many men this secrecy may have served to protect their reputation or prevent them from being embarrassed, it also functioned to strengthen their connection with the other men in the settings.

Respect for Others

By far the most common reference to creating a sense of community among public sex cruisers was the statements about respecting and being respected by other men from these settings. Nearly every man in this group stated or implied that respecting the other men in the setting was part of their experience of community. In Chapter Five, I discussed the ways in which men were cared for and cared for the men they met while cruising for sex in a park, bathhouse, bookstore, sauna, or

tearoom. As Dusty responded, “I found in my experiences people will watch out for you. So they’re an unspoken friend...Any time you have a care for someone, there’s got to be a connection there.”

David (who does nonprofit work) said, “There is a community of men... there’s a lot of caring and support for each other. People aren’t there to like harm each other.” David talked about the immediate trust that existed among men who use public sex environments. The inherent trust among public sex cruisers was how David experienced a sense of community. He said, “I was talking about that trust and how that instantly is established, and that’s a powerful thing, so you’re connecting and you’re like simultaneously creating this network and community at the moment it’s happening.” David believed that you were “building a relationship with this person because you’re trusting them.” He enjoyed the anonymity of public sex sites, but also enjoyed getting to know some of the men he met in such settings. The fact that he could trust the men he met in public sex venues meant for David that a deep bond of comradeship existed for public sex users. Also, David’s comments about trust among public sex cruisers highlighted the sense of safety that nearly all the men felt while at a public sex venue. The norms of trust and respect create a sense of security and privacy for the participants regardless of whether or not the men experienced a sense of community.

Four of the men described the camaraderie of public sex as an aspect of their sense of community. The good will and casual rapport between friends that is meant by camaraderie captured the respectful attitude of most of the men in public sex sites. Jay (37-year-old singing waiter) summed up his experiences of public sex in this

manner, "The bonding experience that I have with men that use PSEs is that camaraderie of it, not the activity itself while doing it, but the shared communication about it." For many of the men, being able to talk about their public sex with other men who use public sex settings reinforced their sense of connection with each other and that sense of being part of "a secret underground."

Randy discussed how his involvement with public sex expanded his social world. He thought that the sense of community he experienced was "deep, but narrow. It wasn't like you really got to know the people in their wholeness." Randy met men he would not have otherwise met by going to public sex locales. He appreciated the opportunities to meet these men. He said, "Like I had sex in baths with a couple of black men and that's the only time that's happened and meeting people from different ethnic groups, older men ... I made contact with a lot of men." Randy realized looking back that he rarely socialized with men of color and older men, so he was glad that he was able to meet these men, even if it was just sexual. Randy respects those memories of meeting men of color and older men in the baths. While these were positive memories for him, his memories served to reinforce the reality of racial segregation of most people's lives. Still, his memories offered a tentative yes to Diehl's question regarding the ability of public sex to promote "organizing across lines of difference" by gay men.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I discussed the contradictions of the men who stated they did not experience a sense of community although their responses implied some bond with the men they met in public sex sites. Some of the men believed that there were too many factors involved with public sex to make a strong statement claiming that community existed for public sex cruisers. Finally, the majority of the men stated that community existed for those who used public sex locales. I discussed the ways that the men experienced community among each other. Anderson's (1991) "imagined community" that exists based on a "deep, horizontal comradeship" captures the experiences of these men. The camaraderie of public sex functions to create a bond of trust and respect among the men.

Diehl (2000) views public sex as providing a site where gay men may be able to form 'strategic collectives.' He states, "The literal structures of tearoom behavior outline a symbolic model of forging political alliances and affiliations in other public venues" (108, emphasis in original). I assert that while the structures and rituals of public sex do outline a *symbolic model* for organizing, gay and bisexual men do create alliances within public sex settings that continue into other public, and private, spaces. Randy met men of color and older men, Robert met his partner, who was white, in a bathhouse, Alex met white men in public sex settings, and Jerrod's interactions with gay men as a closeted bisexual demonstrated some of the ways that men created alliances across lines of difference. Several of the men interviewed consciously viewed public sex as producing a critique of rigid, heterosexist ideas about love, sex, intimacy, and privacy. Brad enjoyed public sex because "it's the one

thing that the gay community has that the straight world just doesn't take over at all ... this is something that is totally exclusively to gay people." Brad's comment revealed the masked gendered segregation of gay and lesbian space by using the term "gay people" instead of "gay men." Brad discussed his frustration that everything in the world is organized for heterosexual couples and their children. He wanted a space where he was the "normal" one. He wanted a space organized around his desires and needs. He wanted a space where he did not have to hide what pleasures he enjoyed.

Butler (1993) states that inhabiting an abject state produces critiques of hegemony. Boyd (1997) discusses the ways that inhabiting a queer space provides sites for resistance against the state. Both authors claim that being outside cultural and societal recognition can be sites for agentic action. Public sex, situated between heteronormative sexuality and homosexual respectability, constitutes gay and bisexual men as activist. By challenging heteronormativity in public sex acts, gay and bisexual men offer alternative forms of organizing and theorizing – not just symbolic models. As an abject sexuality, public sexual expression among gay and bisexual men provides an opportunity to reorganize contemporary notions of privacy, intimacy, sex, and community. As Brad's comments attest, men are consciously using public sex spaces as sites for pleasure and political critique. As men become more aware of the potential for public sex to be more than just about orgasm and pleasure, public sex becomes a site for social organizing, as well as theorizing about identity, community, gender, caring, and sexuality. However, the existence of men using public sex settings is in of itself a political challenge regardless of whether the men are consciously being politically resistant.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Within sociology, the claim that public sex is anonymous and impersonal continues to influence research. Beginning with Humphreys (1970), the guiding assumption has been that public sex is merely casual and separate from the rest of the men's lives. The purpose of this study was to explore the ways public sex serves as a site for gay and bisexual men to experience something more than just impersonal sex, so as to open up new directions for research. Gay and bisexual men shared more of themselves in public sex venues than just their physical bodies; they interact with one another socially, emotionally, and intellectually. For instance, the most common means of meeting someone in a public sex locale was to talk to him during or after the sexual experience. Moreover, the men from this study also talked with other men in these sites during the "down time," those in-between moments of inaction. Public sex sites offered several of the participants the only opportunities to visit with the men who became their friends through their use of these settings. For some of the men, the reason for going to the site was to visit friends; finding a sexual partner was secondary. In contrast to research that states that most public sex participants rarely talk with the men they meet in the settings (Desroches 1990), every man that I interviewed talked with the man from the public sex locales they used.

While the majority of the men from this study developed some form of friendship with the men they met while cruising for sex, other men from this study stated they did not. For the men who said they did not befriend men they met in public sex locales, their experiences often contradict their understandings of public

sex. The men from this study actually have met men from a public sex site who became a friend or romantic interest; however, they do not typically remember the relationship as having started in a public sex locale. The construction of the men who use public sex settings as pathological and the assumption that these sites are impersonal combine to influence these men's interpretations of their own experiences.

In this manuscript, I problematized the claim that public sex among men was anonymous and impersonal. I did not intend to negate Humphreys's claim with this research, but instead wanted to broaden the theorizing about public sex settings. Public sex settings provided men opportunities for quick, anonymous sex, but these sites also provided men the possibilities of longer-term friendship, romance, and community. Some might argue that the differences between my findings and Humphreys's study are based on the fact that Humphreys only explores tearooms. My claim, based on participants' responses, was that any public sex site can offer the men who use it anonymity as well as friendship. While some venues were more conducive to getting to know each other, it was not the physical site that determines whether or not men become familiar with each other at a site.

Gay men's communities during the early 70s recognized the solidarity-building aspects of public sex as these communities struggled with representation and visibility (Seidman 1991). Seidman discusses the purity campaigns that emerged during the late 70s and their effects on attitudes towards casual sex. Over the past few decades there has been a near erasure of the theme of community and friendship among academic writers regarding men who use public sex venues. Recently though,

several scholars have resurrected these themes. Chauncey (1994) and Seidman (1991) discuss themes of community building as historical attitudes that have gone out of favor. Increasingly over the past thirty years, men who engaged in public sex, or casual sex, have been portrayed as compulsive or addicts (Seidman). The label addict implies that these men are dangerous, irresponsible, and hedonistic. However, Seidman discusses the “beneficial aspects” of separating sex from romance, or what he calls the contemporary American culture of intimacy. He concludes that the separation of sex from romance facilitated the possibilities of new sexual collectives, such as sadomasochists and swingers. I want to add to that list gay and bisexual men who enjoy public sex. In the restrictive climate of the 80s and 90s, these men are daring and brave as they forge new alliances and reclaim stigmatized forms of community building. These men also offer new directions for organizing and theorizing community.

For this project, I interviewed thirty gay, queer, and bisexually- identified men. I asked questions about the relationships they created while cruising for sex in a public sex locale. In the methods chapter, I discussed the challenges of doing research in a sexually charged setting while trying to conform to an institutional review board’s traditional notions of acceptable methods. In the four data chapters, I presented findings based on the men’s responses. Each of these chapters supported the claim that public sex settings provide the men who use them much more than anonymous sex. In Chapter Three, I explored the ways in which men began to talk and get to know each other in “anonymous” sex venues. I established the foundation for expanding the traditional thinking concerning public sex as anonymous. In

Chapter Four, I discussed the types of relationships that developed among the men who use public sex sites. These relationships ranged from brief sexual partners in public settings to live-in partners in the private sphere. Chapter Five argued that an ethic of caring exists within public sex locales, and this finding challenges hegemonic standards of masculine sexuality. The existing theories of gendered sexuality do not adequately explain gay and bisexual men's public sexual expressions. In Chapter Six, I suggested that the men who use public sex settings were creating new communities of belonging. These communities provided opportunities for organizing which is often ignored by mainstream gay and lesbian organizations.

To begin, I used experiences and observations from my life and work during the informal part of my research to understand how best to solicit participants and obtain the data I sought. Because these experiences were often sexual (i.e. because I am a user of these settings) I have queered my methodological practices. By this, I mean that I employed methodologies and ways of knowing that continued to be criticized by power structures as acceptable means of doing scientific research. Indeed, these methodologies may never be accepted as legitimate by institutional review boards. The heterosexist and sex-negative assumptions of scientific research continue to influence, which methodologies are acceptable and whose knowledge is legitimate. The methodologies I used challenged the standard protocol of sociological inquiry. Thus, queer methodologies revealed how heteronormativity and sex-negativity were part of the foundation of social science research. In this way, my methods could be seen as somewhat abject. Butler (1993) states that by being external to the structures of institutional power, a subject is able to produce

knowledge that can reorganize those structures of power. She calls this being in an abject state. Abjection exposes the fissure between what is intelligible and what exists but is not recognized due to its cultural unintelligibility. Discussing the problems of using racist and sexist tools to examine racism and patriarchy, Lorde (1984, 110) states, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." I echoed her sentiments as I embarked on this project. While I did not use sexual interactions with my participants as a way to solicit their involvement in the study, the circumstances of how we met and our relationships provided much of the impetus for this study.

I examined two broad aspects of public sex among gay and bisexual men: the experience of community and the ethic of caring. I explored the ways that men produced an ethic of caring among men who use public sex sites. Their interactions were permeated with a substantial level of caring and concern. This ethic of care was evidenced by the near invisibility of public sex sites to those who were not seeking sex. As a strong example of hegemonic ideals of masculine sexuality (emotional detachment), public sex among men seemed like an unexpected site for caring and concern. The participants discussed the ways that they were cared for and cared for the other men they met in public sex sites. The men maintained the secrecy and "anonymity" of the participants in other settings. In a mostly nonverbal environment, the men negotiated a sexual exchange that was mutually satisfying. An ethic of caring among men who used public sex locales promoted a sense of camaraderie. The men from this study cared for the men they meet in public sex venues in many ways. The men recalled examples of caring that ranged from protecting one another's

privacy to sharing information about police raids, good sites, busy times, and specific men's talents or attributes. Also, several participants from this research discussed how these settings provided many men a place to come and just be themselves in a collective of men that were welcoming. The men discussed ways that gay and bisexual men protected their partners' sexual health concerns - contradicting many reports that portrayed these settings as sites of contagion.

While much of the literature that discussed the community building aspects of public sex among men treated it as a pre-Stonewall phenomenon, the men I interviewed responded that public sex still functions to create a sense of community for the men who used these sites. The participants experienced a sense of community with other men through the use of shared language, a belief in shared goals, shared secrets, and respect for each other. As a solidarity building tool, public sex offered the men who used these settings opportunities to respond to a society with oppressive homophobic sexual standards. An increase in Internet web sites and print publications aimed at men who used public sex locales suggested an increasing sense of organization than was previously available. The participants' comments and experiences provided alternative ways for queer communities to identify, build alliances, and challenge a hegemonic culture that marginalized non-conformist sexualities.

MOVING FORWARD

Along with its advantages, this research has several limitations and raises questions for further research. My findings are limited to the men I interviewed. These findings were based on a sample of convenience and should not be used to

make broad generalizations. Scholars and lay people alike often impose conceptual models on groups different from the source. To clarify this point, I will discuss three separate expressions of male-male sexuality that tend to be collapsed into existing models of gay sexuality: men of color, men who have sex with men in “Third World” countries, and non-gay identified men who have sex with men in industrialized countries.

Men of Color

The racial/ethnic composition of the sample is relatively consistent with the state’s racial/ethnic population estimates. However, I only briefly suggested racial/ethnic differences of men’s experiences of public sex sites. I did not gather data concerning the experiences of men who used public sex settings that were identified by community standards as sites mostly frequented by men of color. Social histories of gay and lesbians of color critique the use of white, middle-class standards or definitions in theorizing what may be different realities (Hanawa 1997; Almaguer 1998). African American men and women have used alternative spaces to socialize and organize than gay and lesbian Whites (Thorpe 1996). Thorpe discusses how African American queer life was virtually invisible while scholars relied on White standards of experience, instead of looking for qualitatively different experiences for African Americans. The disproportionate number of men of color who stated that there was no community within public sex environments (PSEs) suggested that gay and bisexual men of color may use PSEs differently than white gay and bisexual men. While public sex venues allow men with differences to create alliances, these sites are not free of cultural beliefs about race, class, gender, and age. I want to avoid

overgeneralizing men of color's experiences in public sex locales based on conclusions from this study. I do not want findings based on public sex sites that were considered white to be used to generate conclusions about settings that are used predominantly by men of color. The findings were based on men who used sites that were considered racially white by the men. It is important to acknowledge that there might be differences in settings that are predominantly used by men of color.

The experiences of men of color require further analysis than I attempted in this manuscript. The questions that were raised by this research for men of color include but are not limited to, the following: Are there interactional differences among public sex settings that draw a predominant patronage from men of color? Do men of color use these settings differently than white men? What roles do ethnic inequalities and stereotypes play in the sexual landscape of public sex venues? Are public sex locales more or less racially diverse than the communities in which they exist? How do sexual identities among racial/ethnic groups impact the ways in which public sex venues are used?

“Third World” Sexualities

I focused on public sex settings available to men who live, socialize, and work in an affluent urban setting within a wealthy industrialized nation. I chose this setting for convenience; these were the men who were available to me based on where I lived. A few of the men's experiences suggested that, for men in rural settings, public sex locales continue to be *the* venue for men to meet and get to know each other.

In an attempt not to colonize “Third World” nations' sexual systems, I address another limitation of this research. Industrialized nations' conception of sexuality can

not be imposed upon other sexualities. Different histories of gender, race, sexuality, and the public-private split combine to produce a conception of sexuality that may not resemble current Western notions of sexual theorizing and organizing. For “Third World” nations, the use of gay and bisexual identities may not make sense, a distinction between private and public may be irrelevant, and community building around sexual behaviors may be unsustainable.

Non-Gay Identified Men Who Have Sex With Men

I interviewed men who identified as gay, bisexual, and queer. All the men who participated in this study recognize their connection with the larger gay and bisexual men’s communities. The men who do not identify with these larger communities acknowledged their personal choice not to engage with the culture and rituals of LGBT communities. Public sex settings were sites where differences could be briefly set aside in pursuit of an orgasm, or the differences could be used to enhance the attraction of one party to the other. Robert talked about his desire to have sex with straight-identified men; for him, the difference of identity was not ignored but heightened the erotic tension. The gay and bisexually identified men from this study created a sense of caring and community among one another, which challenged earlier claims about gay men’s use of these spaces (Karlen 1971; Saghir and Robbins 1973) and who frequented these sites (Humphreys 1970; Desroches 1990). Gay and bisexual men accepted an identity that frames their individual experiences as belonging to a collective experience. Public sex locales, along with bars, coffee shops, other businesses, and community centers, were sites where gay

and bisexual men created a sense of belonging; they were sites men found refuge in an often-inhospitable world.

Heterosexually identified men who have sex with men do not share the same collective experience as gay and bisexual men. Public sex settings function differently in “straight” society. Humphreys (1970) and Desroches (1990) focused on heterosexually identified men. Both authors conclude that tearooms are settings for anonymous and impersonal sex. While the men I interviewed stated that parks and bathhouses allowed for the greatest amount of socializing, many of the men also socialized in/near tearooms, saunas, locker rooms, and bookstores. Humphreys’s and Desrochers’s conclusions when compared with mine suggest that tearooms, bathhouses, parks, saunas, backrooms, adult bookstores, and rest stops provide heterosexual, gay, queer, and bisexual men different opportunities. I argue that it is not the particular public sex site that fosters a social connection among the users, but rather it is how the men use the settings. I focus on gay and bisexually identified men in this study and claim that these men use public sex venues differently than heterosexually identified men.

PUBLIC SEX AS ACTIVISM

Sociological scholarship dealing with male-male public sexual expression tends to fall under the sociology of deviance rubric. Lieshout (1997, 341) states that these “researchers especially wanted to know what kind of people these sexual deviants were, where they frequented, and which sexual activities they performed.” These studies continue to treat sex that occurs in public sex sites where men meet other men as perverse and impersonal (Lee 1990 in Lieshout). This research

challenges the continued treatment of public sex among men as impersonal within the discipline of sociology. Historians, geographers, cultural theorists, and architects are shifting the contemporary theorizing of public sex (Chauncey 1994; Bell and Valentine 1995; Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter 1997; Howard 1999). Few sociologists are to be found in this current literature -- Hollister (2002), Leap (1999) and Seidman (1991) being a few of the exceptions. This research joins with other sociological scholarship to generate new knowledge to enhance the theorizing about public sexual expression among men.

While public sex as community building and sexual liberation had lost some of its clout within contemporary gay and lesbian public discourse, it remained an important site for gay and bisexual men. The disappearance of public sex as solidarity building was partly due to the increase in quasi-ethnic minority model organizing within the gay and lesbian communities and a fearful response to HIV/AIDS. While the public discourse among mainstream gay and bisexual men shifted surrounding public sex, gay and bisexual men continued to seek out connections with other men in these settings. Men used these sites to discuss queer life and health, along with their searches for sexual gratification. Public sex settings functioned as social outlets, just as they did in pre-Stonewall times. However, the past twenty years has witnessed a construction of these sites as pathological instead of liberating and community building.

Public sex venues continue to serve the men who use them in multiple ways. As I have shown in this project, public sex among men is more than just a quick sexual release. The realization of the complexity of public sex venues illuminates five

broader implications. To foreshadow them here, let me first call attention to how traditional sociological thought continues to adhere to heterosexists assumptions that negatively influence gay and bisexual men's self conception. First, I have written this manuscript in hopes that other gay and bisexual men will read it and hear their stories being told. Second, I have written this hoping that sexual health policy makers and service providers will have a broader framework with which to theorize their policies and outreach programs. The participants' recollections demonstrate the ethic of caring that exists among public sex cruisers that is often ignored or downplayed in research about and services for these men. Third, I hope that the argument I presented here will compel scholars to recognize the cultural and personal importance of public sex sites for gay and bisexual men. These sites provide many gay and bisexual men friends and lovers. These spaces complimented other spaces where gay and bisexual men found romantic love and friendship. Fourth, I hope that gay and bisexual men will reclaim the significance of these sites and challenge policy makers and service providers. Last, I hope that, armed with this information, scholars will approach these sites with fewer heteronormative assumptions and less sex negativity.

The men who participated in this study discussed how they met others in public sex sites and their observations challenged traditional models of public sex as anonymous. Their comments revealed how they use public sex settings to meet tricks as well as buddies, friends, and lovers. I presented their stories not to completely displace older conceptual models but to articulate their limitations. The participants' responses affirmed the sense of camaraderie that existed among men who use public sex settings. When public sex sites are theorized as *social venues*, as well as sexual

ones, traditional models of public sexual expression are exposed as being limited. When public sex settings are theorized as sites of *political resistance*, the oppressive conditions of a society that deny queer people citizenship are implicated. When public sex venues are theorized as sites for *community building*, the surveillance of public homosexual expression is revealed as attempts to maintain the closeted status of sexual non-conformists. When public sex is theorized differently, a new direction for research is proposed.

One such direction is the role of the state. For example, Duggan (1994) argues that for sexual rights to be addressed more evenly, the state needs to be “queered.” She means that gays and lesbians and other sexual non-conformists should start denaturalizing heterosexuality instead of legitimating homosexuality. A discussion of sexual difference that reveals how heterosexuality is supported by state policies, denaturalizes desire and identity, and uses a language of inequality instead of morality exposes the political considerations that remain masked under the current state regulation of sexuality. Duggan suggests that queers reconceptualize their relationship to state politics. She calls for thinking about sexual difference as “a form of dissent” and not in terms of naturalized identities. Davis (1995) discusses the problems of relying on naturalized identities when discussing communities. Duggan believes that dissent, as a political strategy, would present sexual differences as oppositional instead of immoral. She believes that the “notion of dissent would join together our right to sexual conduct, both desire and expression, as well as our right to a multiplicity of possible shifting identities, and our right to state a viewpoint and promote it, to express ourselves publicly, politically, and culturally” (1994, 13).

These sites and the men who use them draw our attention to the societal promotion of a certain type of heterosexuality: private, coupled, and “vanilla.” Public sex needs to be viewed as part of a larger promotion of an oppositional politic of sexuality -- one that promotes an understanding of sexualities as politically ordered and not just naturalized identities. Public sex queers sex. Boyd (1997) claims that being queer can resist and restructure the state. Diehl (2000) argues that tearooms provide symbolic models for political resistance; I, along with others (Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter 1997), argue that sexual expression in public spaces is a form of political resistance. When queers claim even the smallest piece of public space for their use, it is a political act that threatens the heteronormative foundation regarding the use of public space.

In this manuscript, I have discussed the multiple ways that gay and bisexual men view and use public sex sites and the non-traditional methodologies I used to gather data. The relationships developed in these locales provide sharp contrast to claims that these sites are anonymous and impersonal. The methodologies used during this project provide a challenge to traditional methodologies. I wish to highlight two outcomes of this research. First, I recuperated the term “public sex” from a tradition of thinking about public sex as impersonal. Second, I encouraged others to resist and reorganize their sense of what can be deemed scientific knowledge based on the contested methodologies that I employed during the data gathering phase of this project. If queer scholars continue to challenge the heteronormative assumptions of science and scientific knowledge, queer life will be revealed with more participation from queer individuals, more vividness, and greater

accuracy. Science is a politically ordered belief system that continues to be challenged, thus producing more accurate knowledge as more individuals' lives and knowledges become intelligible within the power structures.

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