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# Gay bars of Silicon Valley : a study of the decline of a social institution

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**GAY BARS OF SILICON VALLEY:  
A STUDY OF THE DECLINE OF A SOCIAL INSTITUTION**

**A Thesis**

**Presented to**

**The Faculty of the Department of**

**Social Science**

**San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Master of Arts**

**By**

**William M. Coker**

**May, 2002**

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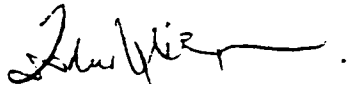
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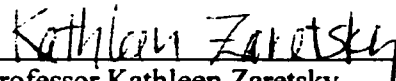
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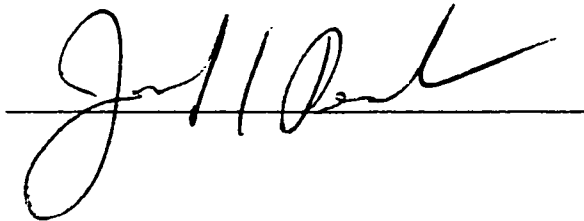
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **GAY BARS OF SILICON VALLEY: A STUDY IN THE DECLINE OF A SOCIAL INSTITUTION**

**by William M. Coker**

**This thesis explores the role of the gay bar and its rise and fall, both in actual numbers and as a primary institution, in fulfilling the social needs of its community within Silicon Valley. The study examines its growth and subsequent decline between 1975 and 2000, along with multiple factors that may have influenced the changes that have occurred during this time period.**

**Research on this subject reveals that the number of gay male bars in Silicon Valley has drastically declined from a one time high of 14 in 1986 to only three in 2001. The onset of this decline coincides with the beginning of the AIDS crisis. However, as the latter peaked and began a significant decline in 1993, the number of gay bars continued their descent. Some of the other factors that may have a relationship to this continuing decline include assimilation, population migration, and the decline of the electronics and manufacturing sectors related to the high technology industry.**



**To the memory of the gay men of Silicon Valley that have fallen victim to AIDS  
who, like the many local bars they once graced, are no longer with us.**

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## INTRODUCTION

Within contemporary Western culture, liquor serving establishments have had a long and intricate association with the gay and lesbian community. Existing as a salient aspect of this subculture, the role of gay bars has often been characterized as having risen to the status of a social institution. A social institution can be defined as the incorporated means that a society uses to satisfy its fundamental social needs (Marshall, 1994). For this reason, Achilles (1967) observes, “the bar is the primary and necessary locus for the male homosexual community” (p. 228). Thus, while providing a physical space for its patrons to gather and socialize, gay bars have also provisioned for the fulfillment of those social needs that are a prerequisite for such an aggregate of people to come together, form a subculture and then replicate itself (Achilles, 1967).

While there have been several well known studies that have served to firmly establish the posture of gay bars as social institutions, most are several decades old and as such, there appears to be a lack of contemporary research documenting the current social role that bars fulfill within the gay community. Some examples of work that may be considered seminal include: *The Development of the Homosexual Bar as an Institution* by Nancy Achilles (1967), *The Homosexual Community* by Evelyn Hooker (1967), *Other Voices: The Style of a Male Homosexual Tavern* by K. E. Read (1980), and *Liquor License: An Ethnography of Bar Behavior* by Sherri Cavan (1966). Despite the age of these works they are, nevertheless, instructive for developing a contemporary understanding of the social processes that transpire within a bar setting. These social processes are significant because they have contributed to the transformation of homosexuality from a perversity into a recognized social category.

Since the aforementioned studies provide--at the very least--an historical window into the past, they have an enduring quality that has provided the conceptual foundation

upon which this study is based. However, there was never an intention to either replicate nor directly challenge their findings, for the standing of their work must be contextualized within social climate of the time and place from which these studies arose. Rather, each study is valuable for both its comparative and contrasting values in examining the contemporary status of gay bars and what changes have occurred over time, if any, to their role as a social institution. At the very least, they serve as a barometer to gauge the level of social change and progress that has taken place over the past four decades.

In examining the contemporary status of the gay bar scene as the focus of this study, a particular emphasis was placed upon those bars located in the greater San Francisco region, especially those found within Santa Clara County. This area--also known as The Silicon Valley--lies in the shadows of San Francisco, widely recognized for its large and visible gay and lesbian community. As Santa Clara County developed into a center for the high technology industry over the course of the past few decades, a growing bedroom community of gays and lesbians became a part of the fabric that comprises the diversity of this region. One noticeable trend that has been observed is the fact that the number of gay bars in the Santa Clara Valley has been in continuous decline since the 1980s, and now has reach the lowest number since the mid 1970s.

In order to better understand the evolution of contemporary gay culture, it is also necessary to examine the nature of homosexuality, the development of subculture, and the role that bars and have played in providing a spatial context in which these factors are conjoined within the context of contemporary society to constitute a gay subculture. Of particular significance is the time period of 1940-1970, which D'Emilio (1998) considers to be a pivotal time in the history of homosexuals in the United States. For it is within this era that both social and psychological dynamics converge, allowing homosexual men and women to make the greatest strides towards liberation that



ultimately allowed them to ascend from being oppressed individuals engaged in a perverse activity to a visible and recognized subculture with a sense of community.

Before continuing, it is necessary to explain that my decision to engage this subject was fraught with personal reticence and required a serious consideration of the implications concerning challenges to the matter of investigator bias and its effect on intersubjectivity. This concern--which is valid and requires acknowledgment and discussion--is due to my familiarity with the subject matter from having changed roles from that of participant-as-member to participant-as-observer. To this extent, mutual concern can only be assuaged through an understanding of the principals of the scientific method that must be utilized as the basis for any social inquiry of this nature, regardless of one's familiarity with the subject matter, with a goal to assure that subsequent results are objective and value free (Stangor, 1998).

Fetterman (1989) reminds us that all researchers possess some degree of bias, a quality that has both positive and negative consequences in ethnographic work. Mann (1985), while expressing that investigator bias is a major concern in social research also reminds us that it is ever-present, since researchers frequently possess some degree of knowledge or preconceived notions regarding the topics they study. However, it is through the use of scientific methods--as it applies to the observation, classification, and interpretation of social phenomena--that any subject matter can be studied with an aim towards achieving objectivity (Mann, 1985). Larson (1993) reminds us that the need to remain value free applies to any social investigator in all matters of research, this being equally applicable regardless of one's status as an insider or an outsider.

While intimate familiarity of the subject matter may arouse concern that emotive knowledge may superimpose itself upon that which must be based upon the empirical, it can also serve as a catalyst by promoting a conscious effort to avoid the pitfall of

subjectivity. As with any member of a cultural group, not all of the processes that one experiences are explicit, nor is every participant equally immersed at all levels of their culture. As such, this study has required me to make a concerted effort to set aside the cultural filters that may lead to the kind of assumptions and bias that would tend to interfere with the study of one's own cultural scene.

Objectivity has required that the word "homosexual," a term that is considered pejorative by contemporary standards, to be used as a descriptive term whose meaning is not entirely synonymous with gay or lesbian. Its use is not only necessary in order to capture the essence of the work of others--some having arisen from an era in which this term was considered appropriate--but also to distinguish the constructs of social-sexual identity from patterns of same-sex behavior where the latter may occur without necessarily attaching the former. To this extent, it would be inappropriate, from a social scientific perspective, to brand all same-sex behavior as "gay."

Likewise, while the development of the homosexual subculture is analyzed within the context of deviance, this word is used in a value free manner that does not impute immorality. Rather, it denotes that as a distinct group they possess their own standards of behavior, which differ measurably from the predominate standards of society at large (Haviland, 1996). Within the sociological context, "deviance" may simply arise from norm violation without attaching a moral judgment upon the behavior in question (Marshall, 1994).

In order to assure scientific objectivity, this study has employed multiple methods, both qualitative and quantitative, and examined multiple sources of data, both primary and secondary. Primary research included the first-hand observation of activity in and about a gay bar in order to discern patterns of gay male behavior that was later compared to information that was gathered through both formal and informal interviews. Secondary

sources involved a review of relevant literature in order to develop a comprehensive perspective and theoretical understanding of the subject matter. Further, archival searches allowed data to be gleaned from historical documents in order to track incipient and ensuing trends in the following areas, which includes: the number of gay bars within the study area, reported AIDS cases, and public opinion survey concerning the public's attitude about matters dealing with homosexuality.

For the purposes of analysis, social constructionism--particularly labeling and interactionist perspectives--serve as the primary theoretical orientation, which is instructive for developing an understanding of the social processes that have facilitated the development of a gay community and the central role that bars have played by providing a necessary environment to fostered its formation. The role of social constructionism recognizes that a homosexual orientation leading to a gay identity can only exist within the defines of culture, as found within a differentiated society where individuals and groups compete for status and establish boundaries in order to be able to form individual and group identities (Connell, 1992).

Since gay bars have long been recognized as fulfilling a significant social purpose within the gay community, matters pertaining to socialization and identity formation are undoubtedly affected by the processes that take place within. Therefore, the purpose in examining the social aspects of the gay bar is two-fold. First, is to understand the nature of the social role that bars have traditionally played within the gay and lesbian community. Second, to determine if the role of gay bars have diminished or changed over time as the gay community becomes more integrated into mainstream society. If the gay community has in fact experienced some degree of assimilation into mainstream society, then an expected result would likely be a measurable diminishment in the role of the gay bar.

Finally, while this study is focused upon a gay social phenomena, it is not a work that should be confused as having implicitly arisen from the field of gay or cultural studies. This is not to denigrate either forms as valid fields of analyses for examining contemporary social phenomena. Rather, it is to properly recognize the key differentiation in this study is due to the employment of rigorous social scientific methods. While principally sociological in nature, this study strives to incorporate methods and concepts that are fundamental within the disciplines of cultural anthropology and history, thus providing an interdisciplinary social science analysis of gay bars as social institutions within our society--the methods of which could be equally applied to the study of any social phenomena.

## BACKGROUND DISCUSSION

### Historical Overview

Erotic activity between persons of the same biological sex has, according to Bullough (1979), existed in some form or manner throughout recorded history. The manifestation of same-sex behavior predates the use of the terms, “heterosexual” and “homosexual.” These words, having risen out of the medical discourse of nineteenth-century Germany, served to formalize the distinction between the conduct of those whose sexual drive was directed towards persons of the opposite sex and those whose erotic feelings were for the same-sex (Katz, 1990). Along with this labeling of sexual behavior ensued the ideology that one typology--heterosexuality--was indicative of normalcy, while homosexuality denoted abnormality (Katz, 1990).

While the word “homosexual” is not a gender specific term, the history of homosexuality has been typically rendered as little more than a description of male-male only sexual experiences (Rind, 1987). Researchers and historians have offered several reasons for this misogynist tendency. First history has largely been the product of male historians. As such, works of the past tended to accentuate a male-dominant world view. *Homosexuals in History*, by Rowse (1987), is perhaps demonstrative of this point. Out of 36 individuals present as historical homosexual figures, all are male. In acknowledging his obvious lapse at inclusiveness, Rowse (1987) offers that his understanding of female homosexuality is perhaps lacking, thus it was better left to those who may possess a greater expertise in this area.

Bullough (1979) contends that male homosexual behavior has been given more historical notice because it has simply received greater attention thus subjected to open ridicule, while the sexual behavior between women has been largely ignored. Greenberg (1988) suggests that male-male sexual experiences have received more attention because

the prevalence of homosexual conduct between males has always been presumably greater than same-sex conduct between women, thus leading to a behavior pattern that was more easily observed. Rowse (1987) also points out that in the past, women tended to be more secretive about their private affairs.

Historians, including Bullough and Bullough (1994), also contend that female homosexuality has escaped historical notice because close relationships between women were more likely to be considered a sign of friendship, often encouraged, and seldom subjected to the level of suspicion that would be cast upon a similarly close male-male relationship. Greenberg (1988) suggests that prior to the twentieth century, conditions were not particularly conducive for the forming of “lesbian subcultures” (p. 14). While lesbian subcultures may not have been observed, this does not imply that there was an absence of lesbian relationships (Greenberg, 1988). As such, sexual conduct between women remained largely a private affair kept between those who were involved, which in turn allowed them to exist without drawing particular attention.

#### Patterns of Homosexual Behavior

While it may be a historical fact that sexual behavior between persons of the same biological sex has long existed, the context and import of those relationships have differed measurably. Although patterns of homosexual behavior have been openly practiced in some societies, such as in ancient Greece, it has been the subject of scorn in others, as it was amongst the ancient Jews (Bullough, 1979, p. 2). According to McCaghy and Capron (1997), “the story of Sodom gave a name to homosexuality and also set the precedent for the treatment of homosexuals for centuries to come” (p. 404). Laws that were adopted in accordance with Judeo-Christian religious ideology has served to define certain sexual acts, particularly those practiced by homosexuals, in what have become known as “crimes against nature” (McCaghy & Capron, 1997, p. 404).

Contemporary European and American societies' concept of homosexuality within the construct of gay and lesbian social identity labels is not universally shared and can be a limitation for the purposes of developing a full understanding of the variation in same-sex behavior from both a historical and cross cultural perspective. Research has classified same-sex behavior into three categories, generally referred to as transgenerational, transgenderal, and egalitarian forms of homosexuality (Rind, 1987).

Transgenerational homosexuality is typified by relationships that are age-structured between younger and older males (Rind, 1987, p. 397). Ancient Greeks were known to practice, with some degree of regularity and social acceptance, a form of "erotic apprenticeship," sometimes referred to as pederasty (Rind, 1987, p.400). A contemporary model of transgenerational homosexuality can be observed in the practices of some Melanesian cultures involving semen exchange rituals, which the Sambia are perhaps the most often cited example (Elliston, 1994).

The key differentiation between transgenerational and other forms of homosexuality is that it occurs between those with obvious age differences, is typically institutionalized within those societies, and it is transitory in its practice by the individual. Thus, it is perceived as serving functional purpose by promoting physical and/or psychological nurturing in order to facilitate the process of maturation without connoting a lifelong behavior pattern. Rind (1987) asserts, "the data indicate that transgenerational homosexuality (i.e. man-boy sex) has been the most common form of same-sex relationship in which adult males cross culturally and historically been involved" (p. 399).

Trangenderal homosexuality--or cross-gender behavior--is perhaps best exemplified in a historical context by the "berdache," a form of institutionalized homosexuality once widely practiced by most North American Indian societies (Roscoe,

1995). This cross gender tendency was thought to develop at an early age and was considered to be a set pattern by the time they reached puberty (Rind, 1998). What is important to distinguish this behavior from mere cross-dressing is that the transgenderal acts in a gender role that is discordant with their biological sex, typically assuming a passive role in relationships with a partner whose role is that of a "masculine male." (Rind, 1998, p. 399). Benedict (1933) referred to the berdache as "men-women," persons whose biological sex determination was that of male, but who assumed a social role and identity more indicative of a female. In the case of the berdache, this gender variant role was culturally accepted and sometimes associated with shamanism or spirituality (Nanda, 2000). According to Nanda (2000), some cultures--Hindu India for example--consider transgenders (known as Hijdras) to be neither man nor woman, thus giving rise to the concept of a third gender category.

Contemporary cross-gender behavior is still a widespread phenomena and variations can be found worldwide in various cultures (Davis & Whitten, 1987). While cross-dressing behavior is often times considered a homosexual tendency, it is neither an exclusive or a significant aspect of this subculture, nor definitive of the transgenderal form. Tranvestism involves passing--often on a temporary basis--as a member of the opposite sex (Marshall, 1994). Although some researchers have chosen to use the term "transvestic homosexuality" in reference to "effeminate males" who adopt the behavior and appearance of the opposite biological sex through "cross-dressing" (Whitham & Mathey, 1986), the actual practice of cross-dressing is practiced by both homosexuals and heterosexuals (Allen, 1996).

Egalitarian homosexuality consist of relationships between same-sex persons who are similar in age and who do not necessarily assume or change specific gender roles, thus exhibiting the characteristics of being more or less equals in the relationship (Rind,



1998). Rind (1998) considers this form of homosexuality to be the type most common to contemporary European and American cultures. However, he notes that it has rarely been observed as a stable pattern of sexual behavior in other times and places. When it is found in other cultures, it seldom becomes institutionalized, is often transitory, and does not become the basis of a gender or social identity based upon sexual preference (Greenberg, 1988). Identity labels of gay and lesbian are social constructs arising out of the contemporary Western practice of the egalitarian form of homosexuality, which assumes a lifestyle indicative of a stable and lifelong social-sexual identity (Marshall, 1994).

### Sexual Orientation

Not every one who engages in sexual acts with persons of the same biological sex identifies themselves as gay, nor necessarily consider their sexual contacts to be homosexual in nature. Cass (1984) observes that “a homosexual self-image is the picture held with reference to sexual preference” (p. 144). As such, how that self-image is perceived, interpreted, and assigned meaning is unique to each person and varies by culture as well. However, sexual orientation involves more than the process of self-acceptance or the self-application of a label, for it involves the adoption of certain traits and behaviors unique to the category one comes to identify themselves with (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Accordingly, the process of identity acquisition involves congruency between ones “social identity” as it applies to the acceptance and/or participation in certain groups and the development of a “personal identity,” or in other words, how they come to view themselves within both a singular and plural tense (Cox & Gallois, 1996, p 13).

The assigning of a social identity or the labeling--as homosexual--of those individuals whose sexual attraction is directed towards members of the same biological

sex is a contemporary Western attitude, according to Nanda (2000). This use of social-sexual identity labeling is not the same in every culture. European and American cultures tend to interweave matters pertaining to biological sex, gender role, and sexual orientation. As part of this blending of social identities with sexual conduct, Western attitude has traditionally considered homosexuality to be effeminate in nature and the antithesis of masculinity (Connell, 1992). Expressing a similar observation, Fejes (2000) suggest, “there are different types of masculinities, ranging from the hegemonic traditional concepts of man as aggressive breeder to the stigmatized masculinity of homosexuals” (p. 113).

Therefore, the constructs of “homosexual” and “heterosexual,” as social labels rather than descriptive terms of behavior, are not cross-cultural universals, and the use of these terms are often applied with differing import in various cultures (Nanda, 2000). For this reason, Elliston (1995) points out that “anthropologists studying homosexuality frequently make a distinction between sexual activities or practices on the one hand and sexual identities on the other” (p. 849). Davis and Whitten (1987) find that on a cross-cultural basis, homosexual behavior is far more commonly “situational or ad hoc,” as opposed being a stable and enduring “life-long” preference (p. 80).

Therefore, it becomes necessary to examine several definitions that effect the analysis of homosexuality and the choice of terminology. Biological sex, as determined by primary sexual characteristics, equates to one being either male or female (Henslin, 2000, 240). Gender role, as it applies to the concept of masculine and feminine, are social constructs that includes those behaviors that are considered to be role appropriate for persons whose biological sex is either male or female (Hirsch, Jr., Kett & Trefil, 1993). While “gender” is often used in place of “sex,” its inference is greater than merely defining the biological determination of male or female. Sexual orientation, as it

applies to a drive or preference for one who desires to engage in sexual activity, is typically classified as heterosexuality, bisexuality, and homosexuality (Hirsch, Jr., Kett & Trefil, 1993). According to Nanda (2000), as a result of the tendency to classify and categorize behavior, is that sexual orientation overshadows--or pervades--one's social role thus it tends to become a part of their primary identity.

Nanda's (2000) comments on the variation in Brazilian gender identity and sex roles is instructive for illustrating how sexuality, gender, and social identity, is manifested in a differing context in another culture. Nanda (2000) contends that in Brazil, it is typically the position that a male assumes during sexual activity that defines their social role or sexual identity. The male who is receptive is considered to be performing in an effeminate role and as such, bears primary stigma for a sexual act performed with another male (Nanda, 2000). Conversely, the male who acts as the penetrator is still considered masculine and bears little or no stigma for their role in what would typically be view as a homosexual act within our culture.

Perhaps the aforementioned point can also serve to illustrate the differentiation between the concept of gender versus biological sex determination. In this instance, both persons are clearly male from the perspective of biological sex determiners, but the role they assume place them into differing gender categories as defined by behavior that is regarded in terms of being either masculine or feminine (Nanda, 2000).

The concept of stigmatizing the behavior of males who perform in a passive, thus effeminate sexual role, has been observed throughout history as well. According to Rind (1992), during the time of the Roman Empire when relationships between men and boys were widely accepted, sexual relationships between two adult males were subject to disdain, since it require one of the men to act in a "passive" role. (p. 398).

This ideology of sexual identity--as it applies to the role one plays rather than sex assignment--can also be observed within our institutional settings, as found in jails and prisons, although its manifestation is typically considered to exist within the confines of a situational context. According to Donaldson (1990), "the prison subculture is characterized by a rigid class system based on sexual roles" with "men" being defined by their role as the penetrator in a prison sexual encounter. Donaldson (1990) contends this role does not stigmatize, but rather, serves to reaffirm their masculine status.

While it may seem reasonable to expect that one's sexual behavior be congruent with their social role, Hewitt (1998) suggests that "a large number of men who engage in homosexual behavior are, or have been, married" (p. 392). Similarly, 54% of those involved in public sex in Laud Humphreys' classic study, *Tearoom Trade*, were also married (Nardi, 1995). Therefore, it is not too surprising that Hooker (1967) found there to exist two distinct groups of homosexuals, which are classified as secret and overt.

Men who may have reason to be secretive, which studies suggest are nearly equal in numbers to those who openly identify themselves as gay, are neither likely to associate with, nor consider themselves to be gay (Hewitt, 1998). Consistent with this assertion, Bagley and Tremblay (1998) found that persons whose self-identity is that of bisexual tend to identify and more closely align themselves socially with heterosexuals. Further, Allen and Oleson (1999) reports that persons who are shy, suffer low self esteem, or experience shame, are also less likely to self-identify themselves as being gay.

Therefore, studies of who comprise the category of gay, along with any study on the social processes that pertain to the gay community must be tempered with the knowledge that this category is both a social and political construct that is as much exclusive as it is inclusive. For some individuals, identifying themselves as being

homosexual or embracing a gay lifestyle is not particularly salient for self-identity (Cox & Gallois, 1996).

### Gay Males and Lesbians

Since this study examines the social processes that take place within the confines of a predominantly gay male setting, it is necessary to examine what difference, if any, exists between how gay males and lesbians manifest their sexual orientation. Several areas of difficulty surface when reviewing literature on the subject of gay men and lesbians. First is the concept of "community," which supposes the existence of some degree of cohesion among those who comprise it. Moon (1995) feels that, "the term *gay community* is ambiguous and problematic," expressing that it "... masks existing inequalities that can lead to disunion among those it is suppose to unify" (p. 490). Consequently, while both gay males and females fall under this umbrella of a singularly defined community, this categorization may fail to recognize inherent differences evident between each group and fails to recognize unique attribute that each possess based upon gender differences, identity formation, sexual drive and its manifestation. Secondly, the term "gay," as it is used to label those who identify themselves as being sexually attracted to members of the same gender/sex, can also be problematic. According to Hewitt (1998), this represents only some of those who engage in same-sex behavior (p. 392).

A major point of difference appears to involve the significance attached to sex drive as a salient part of gay male social identity. Hooker (1967) observes that an emphasis on appearance is a distinct feature of the gay male bar and attributes it to a market mentality in which sex, akin to an economic system of exchange, requires the individual to market the "cosmetic self" in order to consummate a sexual deal (p. 177). Edwards (1996) suggests, "that gay males are more likely than lesbians to arrive at a

homosexual self-definition within a social and sexual context (such as gay bars, parties, parks, and restrooms)” (p. 337).

Sergios and Cody (1986) contend, “that in such institutions as bars and discos, male homosexuals judge prospective partners on the partner’s physical attractiveness” (p.71). They also assert that gay males, without regard to how attractive they themselves may be, consistently preferred someone whom they believed to be more attractive than their own self-image holds (Sergio & Cody, 1986). Thio (1983) suggests that gay men place the same type of importance upon another male’s physical attractiveness as do straight men who focus upon the obvious attributes of females. Therefore, gay males are more likely to come to self-identification as being gay within a social setting that is also conducive for looking for potential sexual partners, which in turn, they are likely to then place an exaggerated emphasis upon looks or attractiveness.

Consequently, it is of little surprise that in nearly every study on gay bars, the underlying motivation for social interaction involves social transactions that ultimately pertain to sexual objectives. Hooker (1964) points out that one of the primary social needs fulfilled by a bar is both the facilitation and regulation of matters dealing with sexual relationships. Expressing a similar sentiment, Achilles (1968) observed, “The bar is the homosexual equivalent of the USO or the youth club, where the rating and dating process may unfolded in a controlled and acceptable manner” (p. 232).

Thio (1983) contends that, where as men--straight and gay alike--are socialized to actively pursue sex, women are typically socialized to be more interested in love. Fitzgerald (1981) maintains that lesbians appear to be more capable of forming longer term relationships than are gay males, as the latter tends to have difficulty merely forming intimate relationships in the first place. Cox and Gallios (1996) cite research that suggests that for some lesbians, sexual experiences with other women did not precipitate

the awareness of their sexual orientation, often having occurred last rather than before their self-recognition as being a lesbian. Likewise, other researchers have also observed differences in the manner in which gay males and lesbians come to form their sense of identity as homosexuals (Cox & Gallois, 1996). For most males, homosexual identity is developed in stages, with experimentation being considered both an early and important one leading ultimately to the adoption of a gay identity (Cox & Gallios 1996). Hite (1979) also suggests that "most men [without specific regard to sexual orientation] are brought up to channel their need for closeness and affection mainly through sex" (p. 355).

The overt emphasis placed upon sex by males in general, and the gay male in particular, suggests that the type of places a gay male might frequent and their underlying motivation for being there may also differ from how lesbians come to see and manifest their sexuality (Read, 1980). Read (1980) reports that--with few exceptions--gay male bars significantly outnumbered lesbian bars. Further, Read (1980) reports that bars in general have traditionally been a male hangout, and this phenomena carries over to the gay bar scene as well. Accordingly, gay male bar establishments outnumber gay female bars across the country, and the tendency to segregate by gender is prevalent (Read, 1980). Out of the 16 abstracts listed under the heading of "Bars" in Dynes (1987) research guide on homosexuality, only one specifically relates to the study of a lesbian bar.

Fitzgerald (1986) observes that in San Francisco during the 1970s, gay males were extremely promiscuous, however in contrast, gay women rarely had casual sex. Spada (1979) reveals that 65.3% of surveyed gay men who had lovers indicated that both partners engaged in sex with other persons during the course of their relationship. Hite (1979) found that "most gay men believed in a style of life that was neither 'monogamous' nor 'promiscuous,' suggesting that a non-monogamous but committed

relationship was the ideal” (p. 840). Citing data taken from Kinsey Institute surveys, Fitzgerald (1981) reports that gay women rarely talked about sex, rarely engaged in “cruising” for sex, and rarely had casual sex (p. 56).

According to Read (1980), there is a natural differentiation between gay men and gay women due to “cultural values associated with biological gender [that] tends to override a sense of common cause and to inhibit cooperation between male and female homosexuals.” (p. 9). While Fitzgerald (1986) credits the mobilization of resources to battle the AIDS crisis in the 1980s as having the effect of bringing the greater gay community--male and female--closer together, it also expressed that the gay liberation movement may have served more to contrast the differences, rather than the similarities, between gay men and gay women. Leznoff and Westley (1968) assert that the homosexual community is actually comprised of many “distinctive groups” of people who, while sharing some commonality of thought and behavior, “. . . interact on the basis of antagonistic cooperation” (p. 196).

### Deviance

Connell (1992) points out that sociologists have typically viewed and studied homosexuality within the context of deviance. Foucault (1978) observes that historically, homosexuality has been typically considered a “perversity” (p. 101). In order to better understand the categorization of homosexuality in terms of deviance, it is instructive to examine the implications of labeling perspective.

Becker (1963) classified the homosexual subculture as a deviant group. However, it was not because of a pathological or statistical anomaly, but rather due to the way that others react to the label. According to Becker (1963), “social rules are the creation of specific social groups,” and it is “rule breaking behavior” that results in the application of this “deviant” label (p.15). Similarly, Goffman (1963) categorized the homosexual as a



stigmatized person, one whose “spoiled identity” results from the perception of others to what is view as “blemishes of character” (p. 4).

Societal reaction by those who make rules, sit in judgment of others and then apply labels upon the rule violators, results in the categorization of people or groups as deviant (Becker, 1963). By placing these persons within such a stigmatized category, Goffman (1963) felt that it would serve to promote interaction between those who share a similar stigma thus promoting the formation of relationships from which a special interest group or subculture could potentially arise. Expressing a similar sentiment, Becker (1963) observed that subcultures are typically born out of the sharing of common predicaments in life by those so affected.

Advocating a similar viewpoint, Hooker (1967) argues that in order for an aggregate of individuals to develop a sense of shared identity conducive for group formation, a spatial context--such as that which is provided by a bar--is necessary in order to promote a requisite degree of social interaction. However, bars not only provide the physical environment where people can gather, but a shelter that offers them a degree of anonymity and freedom to function outside the public’s purview (Achilles, 1967). It is also within such an exclusive environment that one can expect to find acceptance among those of similar moral conviction (Read, 1980). As such, gay bars had become one of the few places where homosexuals could derive both a sense of normality and commonality (Weinberg, 1994).

### **Subculture Formation and Socialization**

Nineteenth century urbanization is cited by both Greenberg (1988) and D’Emilio (1983) as having a significant effect on the development of homosexual subcultures in the United States. Small towns and rural environments were not particularly conducive for the open practice of any severely stigmatized behavior, let alone homosexuality. In

contrast, larger population centers allowed their inhabitants to have both a degree of anonymity as well as a concentration of others who may be of a like disposition.

Anselm Strauss, who is quoted in the Foreword of *Tearoom Trade* by Humphreys' (1970), observed that those who flee oppressive small towns or family environments tend to flock to areas of cities where they can find a niche and fend off those qualities of life that they have come to repudiate. Strauss states, "Here are found the people who wish privileged privacy: prostitutes, homosexuals, touts, criminals, as well as artists, cafe society, devotees of the arts, illicit lovers--anybody and everybody who is eager to keep the small town qualities of the metropolis at a long arm's length" (Humphreys 1970, p. viii). Research reveals that the migration of gay males from rural areas to urban centers is a well established and frequently observed phenomena that continues today. undoubtedly in large part for the same basic reasons cited above (Bagley & Tremblay, 1998).

In developing into a recognized social category, the transformation of the homosexual subculture into a legitimized community began to accelerate following the end of World War II (Norton, et al 1994). D'Emilio (1983) argues that the war served to pull young people away from their families on farms and in small towns and thrust them into sex-segregated situations. Upon the end of the war, it lead a large number of these former soldiers--who were mostly male--to resettle in larger population centers such as New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco (D'Emilio, 1983). Such environments, many having served as ports-of-call, already had some basis for homosexual subculture formation in existence.

Kissack (2000) maintains that the beginning of the gay liberation movement was marked by a police raid gone awry at a Greenwich Village gay bar named the Stonewall on June 28, 1969. This incident, known as the "The Stonewall Riot," occurred when the

patrons--victims of constant police shakedowns--physically resisted and fought back for several nights (Kissack, 2000). The "main effect" of the gay rights movement of the 1960-70s, according to Fitzgerald (1986), "was to bring large numbers of homosexuals out of the closet--and into the consciousness of others" (p. 29).

### Social Role of Bars

The development of bars as gathering places for homosexuals--and the bar's eventual ascension to the status of a social institution--must then be considered within the historical context of public drinking places in general as gathering places for those less reputable and the stigmatized nature of the homosexual subculture in particular. Dynes (1987) found that as early as in fifteenth century Europe, liquor establishments served as gathering places where homosexuals were among those who were known to frequent them. Early patterns of a recognized male homosexual subculture began to appear in eighteenth century England in private clubs or taverns that became known as "Molly Houses" (Spencer, 1995, p. 188). Molly behavior typically included cross-dressing, drinking, same-sex dancing, and some sexual conduct, with the latter usually performed in more private areas of the tavern (Spencer, 1995). However, despite the recorded history of Molly House behavior in existence during eighteenth century England, drinking establishments catering to a predominantly homosexual clientele in the United States were not recorded until the late nineteenth century (Dynes, 1987).

Cavan (1966) contends that bars and those who frequent them are often of a dubious nature and that society will tacitly accept a range of conduct and behavior within the confines of a tavern that would otherwise be considered unacceptable when displayed elsewhere. In other words, public drinking places have traditionally served a functional role in society by providing an environment that confines deviance by allowing its practice within a defined context, as such, it is both expected thus allowed to exist within

reason. By being bound to an environment that can be avoided by those who may be offended by such behavior, it has allowed the deviant to practice their seemingly questionable behavior in a somewhat exclusive setting (Cavan, 1966). Therefore, it appears that persons engaged in stigmatized behavior are far more likely to establish a place to gather were they can covertly practice their brand of deviance, complementary to the public's desire to minimize and confine such behavior to those types of places that they are unlikely to frequent.

Achilles' (1968) observed that bars are the focal point of the homosexual community and that its foremost role is to provide an environment that is conducive for socializing. To fulfill this purpose, bars provide their gay patrons with an environment that affords them a necessary degree of safety, privacy, and exclusion from the outside world in which they can gather and where social processes can transpire (Achilles, 1967). One of these processes is that of socialization. The gay bar, according to Hooker (1967), "is a training ground for learning values and behaviors" (p. 168). Therefore, a bar is more than merely a meeting place, for it also serves to provide a classroom of sorts where one learns how to be gay and provides a pathway for incorporation into the gay community (Hooker, 1967). Without that socialization, these persons would be deprived of knowledge relative to the attitudes, values, and beliefs that govern normative behavior in their subculture.

Hooker (1967) found that gay bars serve as places where one can become initiated, learn the rules, and seek legitimation within the gay subculture. It is within the environment of a gay bar that one "acquires a body of knowledge which includes a set of common understandings" (Hooker, 1967, p. 179). Like Achilles--while acknowledging that there are other places that gays may frequent--Hooker (1967) considers the gay bar to be the most the important one of them all. Becker (1963) holds that in order for a stable

pattern of individual deviance to develop, one has to learn deviant motives, a process facilitated through interaction with those who are more experienced. Achilles (1967) concludes that membership in a subculture leads to the satisfaction of both social and emotions needs, while also serving to mitigate internal conflict regarding aberrant aspects of their labeled behavior.

Hooker (1967) suggests that while gay bars may represent a more respectable means of socializing, this respectability has to be considered relative to what was once considered to be typical homosexual gathering places. Locales such as public restrooms, bookstores, bathhouses, and parks, held little pretense other than providing opportunities for engaging in impersonal sex (Humphreys, 1975). Nevertheless, Kates (2000) points out that at least bars provide an environment where gay men and women can gather thus providing the opportunity for the development of more intimate social, rather than merely physical, relationships. Therefore, the development of liquor serving establishments as a locus for gay activity may also constitute some degree of legitimization of social status by placing homosexual liaisons within the context of what could be considered a more acceptable, albeit somewhat dubious, social environment (Achilles, 1967).

It should be noted that some of these studies were first published during an era in which there was a high level of intolerance towards homosexuality, evinced by the fact that homosexuality was illegal in practically every state (Hewitt, 1998). As a result, intimacy within a gay bar was prohibited and touching often discouraged by bartenders and regular patrons in order to avoid legal sanction (Cavan, 1966). As a result of this level of intolerance, several studies have noted that it was not uncommon for bars to have been the subject of constant police attention.

### Alcohol and Drug Use

Research has typically portrayed the prevalence of alcohol and/or drug use within the gay community as being three times greater than that of heterosexuals (Skinner & Otis, 1996). According to McKirnan & Peterson (1989), “high rates of substance abuse among homosexuals are generally attributed to psychosocial factors” (p. 545). Generally, this includes the reliance on bars as social gathering places, normative use of alcohol within those settings, and includes stress from belonging to a stigmatized subculture (McKirnan and Peterson 1989). Weinberg (1994) acknowledges that while some gay males use alcohol for its disinhibiting properties, he downplays its overall significance in contributing to alcohol abuse. Nevertheless, given the emphasis placed upon appearance and sexual motive as previously discussed, it is easy to envision how at least some people may come to depend upon the use of alcohol in social situations because of its property of disinhibition, since the latter is a well known effect, regardless of one’s sexual orientation (McCaghy & Capron, 1997). According to Wright (2000), drug and alcohol use is inextricably linked to gay male social behavior both in and out of the bar scene.

While the bar’s social role within the gay community is often considered by some researchers to be a probable cause for the higher use of alcohol among gays and lesbians, Nardi (1982) suggests this explanation is shortsighted. According to Nardi (1982), opportunity due to environment is but only one potential factor for substance abuse. He reports that research more appropriately implicates the role of stigmatization, particularly, how anxiety, shame, or low self-esteem, affect rates of alcohol and/or drug use (Nardi, 1982). Nardi (2000) later concludes, “socialization into a hedonistic, positively reinforcing life-style revolving around bars and other alcohol oriented social functions is offered as an explanation by this [learning theory] perspective” (p. 23).

McKirnan and Peterson (1995) reveal that, when compared to the drinking patterns of the general population, more gays drink at levels that are considered to be moderate. Skinner & Otis (1996) also suggest, while gays and lesbians generally drink more alcohol than other population groups, the actual consumption of heavy amounts of alcohol has been reduced from disproportionately higher levels to those now comparable to the general population. They conclude that this apparent reduction in rates of alcohol and/or drug use among gay men and lesbians is likely due to “the changing role of the gay bar and the emergence of social activities other than going to bars as a vehicle for social integration” (Skinner & Otis, 1996, p. 86).

### Assimilation

The concept of gay assimilation has been the subject of several articles and publications from sources that can be best classified as gay or cultural studies. Savage (2000) recounts how discrimination led to the creation of what he calls a “parallel gay universe,” where gay owned businesses such as bars, shops, and restaurants that, while being somewhat “unequal,” serve to provide a separate environment that is free of social disapproval from the mainstream (p. 4). Savage also (2000) argues that gay assimilation will lead to the collapse of most gay institutions, except those that are most closely related to the provisioning of sexual relationships.

In Bohling’s (1998) review of *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture*, Harris (1997) is quoted as saying, “as gay men are gradually accepted by society . . . they must necessarily discard those cultural markers that would impede their assimilation by the mainstream” (p.1). An underlying concept is that “oppression” creates a subculture that serves to highlight its differences with the prevailing culture, which assimilation then acts to erode (p. 2.).

Several significant changes have occurred within the gay community since the 1980s that may have had an impact on its social standing within mainstream society. First, a medical crisis struck in 1981 that manifested itself with particular emphasis in the gay male population. As such, it was originally referred to as “gay cancer,” since it was thought to be limited to the gay male population (Aris, 2001). Eventually, it became known as Acquired Immune Deficiency or AIDS, and its ability to infect outside of the gay population was recognized. Shortly after the syndrome was identified, it became evident that AIDS was nearing epidemic levels within the gay community. AIDS began an upward trajectory in the number of newly reported cases, which continued to escalate until it finally peaked in 1993, with 102,000 cases having been diagnosed in this year alone (CDC). The AIDS crisis evoked a community response, which Fitzgerald (1986) maintains, had the net effect of changing excessive sexual behavior and resulted in a forced maturation of the gay community (p.115).

From 1985 to 1989, the Gallup Poll (2001) reveals a negative drift in public sentiment, reporting an increase in the opinion that homosexuality should not be legal. This time frame coincides with the initial phase of the AIDS crisis, in which the numbers of reported cases began to rapidly increase. Those who thought it was not an acceptable alternative lifestyle also increased, peaking at 57% in 1992--one year before the number of AIDS cases would also peak--and then like the number of AIDS cases, the public's negative opinion began to decline until it reached a low of 43% in 2001 (Gallup, 2001).

Coinciding with the gay liberation movement, the number of gay bars in the greater San Francisco area--as found in Damron Bar Guide--shows a steady increase in numbers beginning in the 1970s. However, by the mid-1980s--as the AIDS crisis firmly established itself within the gay community--the number of gay bars peaked and began a significant decline. According to this data, the number of gay bars in Santa Clara County



reached a high of 14 by 1986--the same year that Aris (2001) reports that the first AIDS case appeared in Santa Clara County--with these numbers then displaying a continuous decline that has resulted in only three gay male bars remaining in operation at the end of 2001.

The 1980s also saw rapid advances in the development of the personal computer, which provided the individual with access to an emerging form of on-line communications accessible from their home. By 1992, the Web browser allowed a growing number of people to begin to reach into cyberspace via the Internet, thus establishing virtual communities that has given rise to the concept of "cyberculture" (Levinson & Ember, 1996). Chat-rooms, personal advertisements, email, and real-time live Web cams, all have served to change the way that many people interact socially. Tyrangiel (2000) cites estimates that "20% of AOL's [America On Line's] 21 million subscribers are gay . . . ."

A 1997 survey of gay youth (25 years of age and under) revealed that 51% of the respondents (n=1,918) answered "yes" to the question, "Did they come out on the Internet or on an online service before they did in 'real life'?" 68% answered "yes" to the question, "Has being online helped them to accept their sexual orientation?" As for time spent online, 38% indicated "Several times a day," 47% indicated "Once or twice a day," and 13% indicated "Once or twice a week" (Kryzan & Walsh 1998, p. 17-19).

The Gallup Poll (2001) reports that in 1999, the public's opinion regarding the acceptability of homosexuality was more positive (50%) than negative (46%) for the first time since Gallup began surveying in 1982 on the question, "Do you feel that homosexuality should be considered an acceptable alternative lifestyle or not?" (p.2). The results of 2001 Gallup Poll shows a continuing trend of increasing acceptance (52%) and declining rate of disapproval (43%). The Kaiser Family Foundation (2000) recently

released the results of a public opinion survey that show, “76% of lesbians, gays and bisexuals think there is more acceptance of gay people today than compared to a few years ago,” and that “almost two thirds (64%) of the general public” share this same opinion. (p. 2-5).

Changes can also be found in areas such as the media and the influence it exerts upon gay image construction (Fejes, 2000). Fejes (2000) maintains that modes of communication, such as mainstream advertising, television and film, play increasingly significant roles in the creation and reinforcement of the social identity of gay males. Fejes (2000) also insists that those who are questioning their sexual identity, or are in the process of gay identity acquisition, utilize the media as a source of information to better understand what they are experiencing. Where the gay bar was once the mostly likely place to go to observe the typical image of what a gay male looks like, these images can now be found in mainstream media and advertising (Fejes, 2000). Fejes (2000) concludes that, “media images are very powerful in helping one develop a sense of identity,” and this now extends to the gay male population as well (p. 115).

Both Wright (2000) and Fitzgerald (1986) point out that distinctive gay dress and grooming styles, once termed a “clone” look, were commonly found in the late 1970s to early 1980s in areas with highly visible gay populations, such as the Castro district of San Francisco. As a result of mainstream imaging, the gay social identity has assumed a look that is now complimentary to “consumer manifestations,” rather than its past stereotypical looks, which placed unique stylistic emphasis upon physique, style of dress and mannerisms (Kates, 2000, p. 152). The archetypical homosexual has now been constructed, via this media image, as a “young, white, Caucasian, preferably with a well muscled, smooth body, handsome face, good education, professional job, and a high

income” (p. 115). Part of this image is also the projection of a masculinity that is less erotic and designed to be acceptable to mainstream heterosexual audiences (Fejes, 2000).

Kates (2000) concludes that the unfortunate result of the media’s creation and continual reinforcement of a fabricated image is that it serves to exclude persons--particularly those from discernible ethnic groups--who do not fit the projected image. As a result, “a fake homosexuality has been constructed to facilitate a double marketing strategy: selling products to gay consumers that address their emotional need to be accepted while selling a palatable image of homosexuality to heterosexuals consumers that meet their need to have their dominance obscured” (Fejes, 2000, p.115).

Some of these changes in social acceptability of gays and lesbians by mainstream society has been equated to the process of assimilation. According to Gordon (1964), cultural assimilation involves the transformation of the cultural patterns of one group through its adoption of a dominant group’s culture. As a group moves through varying stages and degrees of assimilation, this could ultimately lead to “civic assimilation,” that being the final stage characterized by the “absence of value and power conflict” (Gordon 1964, p. 71). Along this path of assimilation, matters pertaining to exclusion, social identity, prejudice, and discrimination begin to shed (Gordon, 1964).

Another area that may serve as an indicator of changing social attitudes and points toward increasing incorporation into mainstream society are matters tied to employment by those belonging to a group that have long been subject to employment discrimination. The Gallup Poll (2001) reveals that from 1992 to 2001, public opinion on whether homosexuals should be able to be employed in various occupations--which includes the clergy, teachers, armed forces, et cetera--has shown a significantly positive trend in all categories measured. A recent study published by The Brookings Institution’s Center on Urban & Metropolitan Policy reports, “the leading indicator of a metropolitan area’s

high-technology success is a large gay population” (Florida & Gates, 2001, p. 1). An implication of this study is that the high-technology industry is more tolerant to issues of diversity, and that larger numbers of gay and lesbians--among other typically under represented groups--are employed in disproportionately higher numbers within this industry than most other fields of employment.

Since this area is known for its association with the high-technology industry and the latter’s potential for employing disproportionately more gays and lesbians, changes in employment rates may bear some relationship to changes in special population groups. According to the Employment Development Department of the State of California (EDD), Santa Clara County has experienced two periods of significant increases in unemployment within the past decade, with the first beginning in 1991 that subsided by the end of 1995, and the next occurring towards the end of 2001. At 6.1 %, Santa Clara County’s unemployment rate in December 2001 is higher than both the statewide rate of 5.7 % and the nationwide rate of 5.4 % (EDD, 2002, p. 1).

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Primary Sources

This study incorporates interdisciplinary social science research techniques consisting of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Primary research involved the extensive use of first-hand observation, both informal and formal surveys, and focus group sessions. All of the observations and informal interviews took place within the cultural scene of a single gay bar located in Santa Clara County (California) that served as a model for this study. The focus group session and formal survey was conducted at an off-site location in the same region. All active participants in the focus group were familiar with the model bar, and those who participated in the formal survey have patronized this particular bar at some point in either the past or present time.

### Subjects

With the exception of the aforementioned focus group, the subjects in this study were persons found to frequent the premises of a licensed liquor serving dance bar that caters to a predominately gay male clientele. Since the minimum legal age for admittance to this type of a licensed establishment in California is 21 years of age, all persons within the bar, unless circumstances indicated otherwise, were considered to be 21 years of age or older. No person was approached or questioned if they appeared to be under the legal age to be present in a bar, or if outside of the bar, if they appeared to be under 18 years of age. While I did not seek disclosure of the participant's sexual orientation, casual observation of behavior coupled with the fact that this is a well known gay establishment--whose crowd frequently consists of 90-95% males--allowed me to reasonably conclude that the majority of those present were gay and that any others, whether male or female, were aware of the environment and thus gay friendly. However,

it must be acknowledged that the mere presence in a gay bar is not determinative of a person's sexual orientation.

### Interior Observations

Unobtrusive observation of interior behavior took place over the course of several months. Interior observation recorded the number of persons in attendance, their age range, and activities while in the bar. The goal was to capture a general picture of bar activity and behavior and to note the similarities and variations by time of day and day of week.

Data gathering for the interior phase of the study took place over the course of several months in which recordings were made on 12 separate nights of the week. The amount of observation time per day ranged from 10 to 120 minutes for a total of 545 minutes. These observations were conducted in the evening between the hours of 9:00 p.m. to 12:00 midnight. While observations were designed to capture data for the purposes of distinguishing differences between Friday, Saturday, and all other days combined under the heading of weekday, no effort was made to obtain an equal sampling for each day of the week.

Due to the need to commingle without drawing attention while conducting interior observations, no notes were made during the course of the observation periods. As such, the duration of the sessions were regulated according to the amount of data that could be committed to memory. While conducting interior observation, social involvement was minimized in order to permit observation without distraction or interference. Observations were immediately recorded upon leaving the establishment in a field note book kept in a vehicle.

Numerical data gathered from inside the bar is considered to be relatively accurate and consistent. However, due to the fact that it was not being recorded simultaneous to

its occurrence--coupled with multiple behaviors and activities being observed at the same time--it lacks absolute reliability. Several areas of weakness are evident and attempts were made to compensate, when possible, for the significance of those weaknesses.

The bar is a dynamic scene, whose patronage and activity varies by night of the week, time of the night, and to a lesser extent, season of the year. On a particularly busy night, the ability to gather accurate numerical data can be nearly impossible due to the sheer number of people in attendance. As a result, many characterizations had to be expressed in descriptive terms rather than by numerical values.

One such area of weakness lies in age estimates made by visual determination. In order to avoid the appearance of false precision, they were generalized into decade-long categories (i.e., 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s), rather than narrow age groups. The representation of persons within these age categories within the bar on a particular night was then expressed in field notes by such descriptive terms such as none, few, some, or most. In order to later analyze this data, these descriptive terms were coded into a numerical value for purposes of quantitative analysis. By making the conversion of this particular qualitative observation into a numerical value, it was possible to determine, to the extent that observations were accurate, the age groups most often represented by night of the week. The inherent limitations of making visual age estimates are self-evident, nevertheless, it does provide a source of relative data for comparative purposes.

#### Exterior Observations

In conjunction with interior bar observations, unobtrusive observation of the exterior environment of the bar and parking lot was conducted. This particular bar has two adjacent businesses located on both sides of the building, each having its own separate entrance. Casual observation of the parking lot suggested that there is some activity taking place that is extraneous to the patronage of the business establishments, as

evinced by the volume of traffic observed entering and exiting the lot. In order to validate this observation, the number of vehicles entering and exiting the parking lot as well as the number of patrons entering and exiting the business establishments was recorded for purposes of comparison.

While it is recognized that the underlying motivation of those who participate in any external bar activities may ultimately have a sexual motive, this research is not about sexual activity, *per se*. Rather, it is about social processes that occur in conjunction with the bar, whether it is occurring within or outside of its spatial dimensions. As such, no effort was made to observe or record any matters pertaining to sexual activity. From the vantage points that these areas were observed, thus from the viewpoint of a casual passerby, no sexual activity was readily discernible.

Data gathering took place over the course two months in which recordings were made on 14 separate nights representing two days of observations for each day of the week. The amount of observation time per day ranged from 30 to 45 minutes for a total observation time of 520 minutes for this phase of the research. These observations were conducted in the evening between the hours of 9:00 p.m. to 12:00 midnight from one of two vantage points located across the street from the bar. These locations were chosen as they allowed the greatest field of vision while maintaining the lowest profile. This data, while allowing a small margin for inadvertent error, is considered reliable as it was recorded simultaneous to its observation.

With this in mind, one limitation in the data gathering method that effects accuracy in this phase of the study must be discussed. While conducting observation, it became obvious that there was an error of assumption made by simply comparing the count of persons entering and leaving the bar or the other businesses and its relationship to the number of vehicles entering and leaving the lot. Namely, this comparison does not



take into account those instance where more than one person arrives or leaves in the same vehicle. Therefore, it tends to erroneously portray a one-on-one relationship between vehicles and persons that truly does not exist. The ability to accurately record the number of persons who arrive or leave in the same vehicle was not entirely feasible given the need to be unobtrusive while simultaneously watching several different areas of activity.

#### Informal Interviews

Subjects interviewed within the bar were selected randomly as they were engaging in natural behavior within this cultural scene. The need to obtain candid responses precluded formal interviews within the bar scene itself. No enticements, rewards, or compensation were offered to any participant, and no manipulation or influence was exerted that would tend to alter the natural course of events under observation. Further, no names were attached to any data, nor were specific demographics collected. The goal was to engage in an unobtrusive means of observing behavior and to elicit relevant information for purposes of developing an understanding of gay bar behavior.

#### Focus Group Interviews

A focus group session was conducted with a group consisting of seven males and five females. Of the 13, only one did not participate, nor willingly disclose his sexual orientation. This group had assembled for a meeting that was being held outside of the bar scene and were asked to participate in a brief discussion about gay bars as social institutions. This session lasted for an hour, and no individual was compelled to participate. A full disclosure of the scope of the study and a synopsis of the research was provided. Responses made during the session were recorded on an easel pad, with each observation or opinion being explored in further detail. A follow up session with another group comprised of four gay males was conducted at a later time for the purposes of comparing results.

### Formal Survey Questionnaire

A total of five males were given a full disclosure of the study and, after consenting to participate, were asked to respond to the following questions:

- 1) How long have you been going to gay bars?
- 2) What age were you when you first started going to gay bars and how did you find out about it?
- 3) How often do you go to the bar and is that an increase or decrease from when you first started going?
- 4) What are your expectations when you go to the bar?
- 5) Can you describe what the typical night at the bar is like?
- 6) Do you know about any activities that take place in the parking lot and if so, does the activity or people differ from those occurring inside the bar?
- 7) Is there anything else that you can tell me about your experiences with these or any related matters that would help me with my research?

### Secondary Sources

Information on the historical number of gay bars operating in the greater San Francisco area was compiled from records found in the archives of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender (GLBT) Historical Society of Northern California, which is located in San Francisco. The main reference source for the tracking of bars was the *Bob Damron Address Book*--commonly referred to as the *Damron Bar Guide*--published yearly by Bob Damron Enterprise in San Francisco since 1964. The earliest guide that is maintained as part of the archive is from 1969.

The concept of using information obtained from a gay bar guide as a descriptive research tool is not unique to this study. Whitam and Mathy (1986) utilized the *Spartacus International Gay Guide* to demonstrate the prevalence of homosexuality

throughout different cultures around the world, including some that were thought to have little or no homosexual subcultures in existence. Using a 1979 *Spartacus* guide, their study listed 113 countries--excluding the United States and Canada--that reported the presence of places that homosexuals were known to gather.

For the purposes of this study, information was obtained from editions of the Damron Bar Guide for the years of 1974 to 1990 and 1995, 1996, 1998, and 1999, with editions for the years of 1991 through 1994 and 1997 missing from the archives. In order to complete the data set for the period of 1991-1994 as it applied to the bars in Santa Clara County, reference was made to copies of *Our Paper*, a defunct gay newspaper published in San Jose during the 1980s and 1990s, and also maintained as part of the archive at the GLBT Historical Society. A regular feature of *Our Paper* was a listing of the local gay bars in the greater San Jose area. For the year of 1997, listings were obtained from the 1997-98 edition of *Odysseus*, a bar guide similar to the one published by Damron. Data for the year 2000 was derived from a bar guide listing in *Out Now*, a San Jose based gay newspaper that is currently in circulation. Data for the year 2001 was obtained from Damron's online guide. Together, these sources provided continuous data for the time period of 1975-2001. Further, when comparing numbers for contiguous years, there were no significant deviations found between the different sources that would appear to effect the overall validity of the data set.

In addition to the aforementioned sources, I was able to cross-verify some of the bar data for Santa Clara County with information obtained from a computerized "Sites Database" maintained by the GLBT Historical Society. This database included the name, location, and years of operation--when known--of gay bars throughout the greater San Francisco region, as listed by individual city. Due to the volume of information contained

in the database and the fact that this information was only being used to cross-check other sources, only that data pertaining to the San Jose area were extracted (see Appendix A).

There are several limitations to the veracity of the bar data set that must be discussed in order to place its validity into perspective. Some of these difficulties in gleaning data from these sources, particularly the *Damron Guide*, are the result of significant changes in style and size of the source over time. The total number of listings, according to *Damron*, went from 2,750 in the 1974 edition to over 6000 by 1985. During this period of rapid growth, what started out as small pocket guide listing a relatively small number of gay bars across the United States had expanded in size and scope so that by 1987, it contained listings for Canada, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands as well as paid advertisement.

There were several other areas requiring diligence in order to extract useful data from this source. For example, listings were usually by city, so in order to obtain data for an entire county, the guide had to be checked to see if there were listings under each individual city. Also, early editions of the *Damron Address Book* did not separate the listings into categories by business type. While some listings were obvious because they included the type of establishment in the name, others merely gave a name that required further reference to the guide's evolving use of symbols--single letters that served as a type of footnote--to reference such things as whether the bar was mostly a man's bar or a woman's bar, had a mixed crowd, what the age range of the crowd is, if there is dancing, the types of beverages served, the type of activity or action to be found, et cetera. Later editions began to separate listings into general categories, but there was still a need to check some listing's symbols for the particulars in order to distinguish those bars that were predominately gay from lesbian bars.

Finally, there were instances where a bar was known by the researcher to have existed, yet it never appeared in the Damron Guide for the published year(s) that the bar was in operation. Generally, the listings in this guide trailed the appearance or demise of a bar by up to two years, which must be considered relative to the guide's yearly publication schedule and those bars whose length of operation may have so short they never appeared in the guide.

Despite these shortcomings, this data provides a means of tracking and graphically portraying the historical trend in the number of gay bars in the greater San Francisco region. As such, even if the actual numbers of bars are incorrect, the emergent historical trend depicting either increasing or decreasing numbers of gay bars is considered relatively accurate, since the method for extracting and compiling the total data set was consistently applied.

Other sources of data includes information obtained through both library and online resources. Societal attitudes about homosexuality were compiled from the published results of The Gallup Organization for the period of 1977 through the year 2001. The actual years that The Gallup Poll surveyed on these matters are for the years of 1977, 1982, 1985 to 1989, 1992, 1996, 1999, and 2001. This information was found on-line via The Gallup Organization's Web site, and is also published in print form as well.

Information regarding the number of reported AIDS cases was obtained online from the Center for Disease Control Web site, as found in the *HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report*, issued by the National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention. Local AIDS information was compiled from a printed report issued by the Santa Clara County Public Health Department, and from a local non-profit organization founded in 1986 and known the AIDS Resources, Information, and Services of Santa Clara County (ARIS).

Finally, the report *on Technology and Tolerance* by Florida and Gates (2001) was obtained through The Brookings Institution Web site, a non-profit organization, while unemployment rates in Santa Clara County were compiled from the Employment Development Department Web page accessed through the official State of California Web site. All together, this information is considered credible since they were obtained from recognized and verifiable sources.

#### **Data Analysis**

All tables and figures, except those labeled as “Descriptive Statistics,” were formatted, analyzed, and graphed using the spreadsheet function found in Microsoft® Works 4.5a for Windows 95. Descriptive Statistics were processed with StatView version 5.0.1, a data analysis program produced by SAS Institute.

## RESULTS

### Bar Description

The study bar has a front door set close to the sidewalk of a busy boulevard and is considered to be in a high profile location. It has been in continuous operation for over two decades, although it has changed ownership at least once during this time. It occupies a space between two adjacent adult businesses that, while not exclusively gay, tends to compliment the business environment due to the type of services provided and the crowd they attract.

All businesses are part of the same building complex and share a common parking lot. There is an alley that runs alongside of the building complex next to one of the adjacent stores and connects to the parking lot, which extends from the opposite side of the building with its own separate driveway. It is therefore possible to enter the alley on one side of the building, drive around the back, and exit from the parking lot on the opposite side, or vice versa.

The interior space of the bar measures approximately 35 feet wide by 100 feet long. As you enter the front door, the bar counter is to your left and curves towards the mid-point of the building, seating up to 16 persons on stools, with walk-up serving stations on both ends of the counter. There is a pool table on the right that is separated from the bar and passage way by a pole and railing, and there are built-in benches along the two walls bordering the pool table. Just beyond the pool table, there is a sit-down lounge area measuring 25 feet by 25 feet, consisting of small round tables and chairs, allowing some viewing of the pool table, front door, and the passage way that leads back to the dance floor. Additionally, this area has several video games, a pin ball machine, and television monitors, the latter of which are only occasionally used.

The restrooms are located at the midpoint of the layout, with the walls of the alcove that leads to the restrooms serving to provide a physical separation from the dance area in back and the pool table and lounge area in the front. The dance floor is approximately 30 feet by 30 feet, and has an elevated disc jockey (DJ) booth with an adjacent elevated viewing area. In the very back corner is a door leading to a fenced-in outdoor patio area, the only place where smoking is allowed at the bar. Each of these areas provide a distinct spatial zone with some degree of real or perceived separation from the others, providing an environments where people can engage or disengage in the various activities that are taking place therein.

Lighting throughout the bar is subdued, with some areas being slightly brighter lit than others. Predictably, one of the best lit area is the pool table itself, with an overhead drop-down light fixture that casts some illumination to the surrounding area. There is music playing every night of the week, but a live DJ is only on-duty certain nights of the week. There are usually two bartenders, and on busier nights, one or two cocktail waiters. On Friday and Saturday nights, there is a modest cover charge and entry is controlled at the door by an employee who collects money and checks identification when legal age is questioned. On Sunday and Monday nights, the bar hosts regularly scheduled "Drag Shows," consisting of female impersonators who lip-synch to popular tunes. These shows attract a crowd that varies from modest to moderate in size, with most spectators not being cross-dressers and the cross-dressing members of the gay community otherwise not significantly represented at this bar.

### Patronage

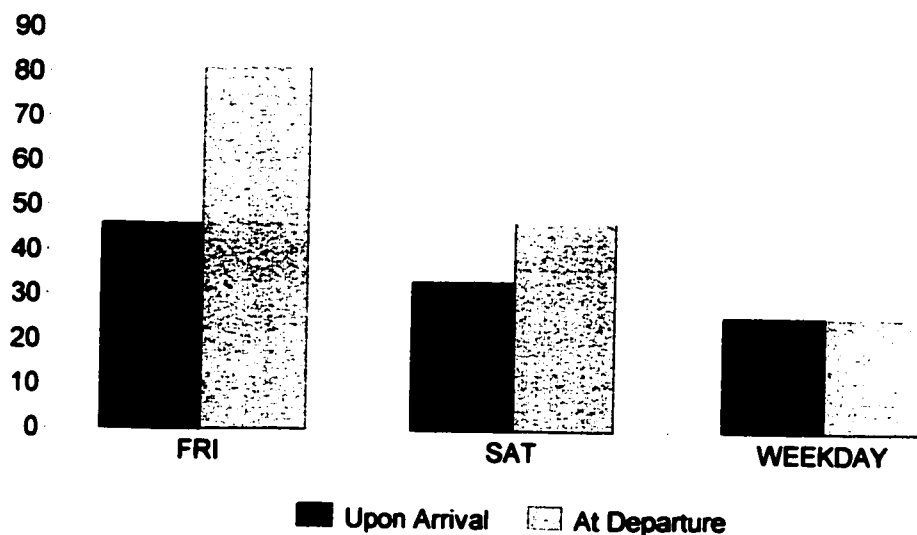
Patronage varies by night of the week. Predictably, weekend nights are busier than weekday nights. At this particular bar, Friday nights the busiest night of the week and the crowd is commonly perceived to be the youngest as well. Saturday is the next



busiest day of the week, with all other days trailing off significantly. Observation confirms that over time this pattern is consistent, although there are occasional exceptions.

Figure 1.

**Bar Patronage by Night of the Week.**



**Bar Patronage by Night of the Week**

**Figure 1.** Attendance observed at model bar by night of the week where all weeknights, which includes Sunday, are generalized into one category. Chart depicts number of patrons and the relative change occurring in those numbers during the periods of observation as measured by counts taken upon arrival and departure of the researcher.

**Sex/Gender**

Males are consistently over-represented in the population of patrons, since only a small number of females were ever present on a given night with those nights being more typically on a weekend rather than a weekday. There have been nights in which the crowd was exclusively male. No attempt was made to characterize the sexual orientation

of the females who were present. Results support the contention of other research that gay bars, in general, tend to be segregated by gender.

Table 1

Sex/Gender of patrons on combined nights of interior observation.(N=12)

Sex/Gender	Total	Mean
Male	217	13.00
Female	31	3.25

### Age

This bar attracts a wide range of age groups. By popular sentiment, Friday is considered to attract the youngest crowd. Observation shows that while the age category of 20s are significantly represented on Fridays, those falling within the category of 30s are in fact the most highly represented group on this night, followed very closely by those in their 20s. A nearly identical pattern is observed on Saturdays, with measures becoming equal for both the categories of 20s and 30s on all other nights of the week.

As the age group increases, the numbers fall significantly. However, the results may partially be a product of the time of night that data was collected as opposed to an error in observation. It was repeatedly observed in field-notes that people within the higher age categories tend to leave as the night gets later, and conversely, persons who fall into the younger age categories tend to arrive in increasing numbers during this same time frame. Since the latest data was collected at 11:45 p.m., a true picture of age distribution until bar closing at 2:00 a.m. is not presented.

Table 2

Coded means of patronage age by decade-long increments.

Age	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s
Friday	2.30	2.70	2.00	1.67	1.00
Saturday	2.25	2.75	1.75	1.00	0.25
Other	3.00	3.00	2.00	.50	0.00

**Note.** Qualitative notes were coded for purposes of data analysis by assignment of the following numerical values as it applies to descriptive expression of persons observed in the bar within the above age groups: none=0, few=1, some=2, most=3. All weekday nights were combined under the category of Other.

Interior Bar Activities

An effort was made to characterize interior bar activity in the following five areas: sit-at bar counter, pool table, sit-down lounge, dance floor, and other. Emphasis on the areas varied by night. However, the bar counter, followed by the pool table, had the highest average level of use across all days. Observations are consistent with numerical data, which suggests that even on a slow night when there is no dancing, the bar counter is the number one locus, followed closely by the pool table. While the dance floor and other areas are rated lower by the mean score, at certain times on a Friday and Saturday night, the actual number of people in these areas significantly exceed those at the bar counter and in the pool table area. The one area that is under represented by activity measure is the patio, which has been placed into the "Other" category. Due to the isolation of this area and the inability to adequately monitor its activity, actual usage of this area is not fairly represented. Periodic checks reveal that its usage is more or less consistent with the level of activity in the bar. The patio's use is often transitory and

situational for most of its users since it is the only place within the bar where smoking is permitted.

**Table 3**

**Activity distribution means by categories of Friday, Saturday, and Weekdays.**

<b>Day</b>	<b>Bar</b>	<b>Pool</b>	<b>Lounge</b>	<b>Dance</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Friday</b>	10.30	10.50	8.00	20.50	1.50
<b>Saturday</b>	9.60	10.00	1.00	6.17	11.20
<b>Other</b>	11.50	3.50	6.00	1.00	4.00
<b>All Days</b>	10.20	9.00	4.43	8.00	7.40

### **Exterior Observations**

Data collected regarding the comparison of vehicular traffic entering and leaving the parking lot of this establishment to the number of patrons entering and leaving all businesses supports the observation that there is a level of activity taking place in the parking lot that is independent of business usage.

Some of the same vehicles were observed entering the lot, exiting within a few minutes, and returning to the lot again within a short time frame. This was a pattern that was repeatedly noted and discernible by the activity of specific vehicles throughout the observation period with some vehicles appearing to merely drive around the block before returning. A few vehicles were observed backing into parking lot spaces with the driver remaining in the vehicle. To a far lesser extent, there was some pedestrian traffic that appeared to be unrelated to business patronage that repeatedly appeared in field notes, but were not tallied as a separate category. The common observation in this regard was for someone to walk from the alley, across the front of the building, and into the parking lot, or vice versa.

Figure 2.

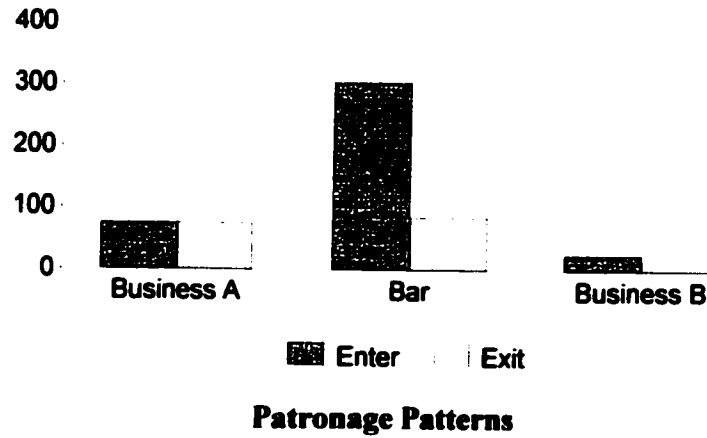
Patronage Patterns.

Figure 2. Business patronage pattern broken down by specific establishments that are contained within the same complex.

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Figure 3.

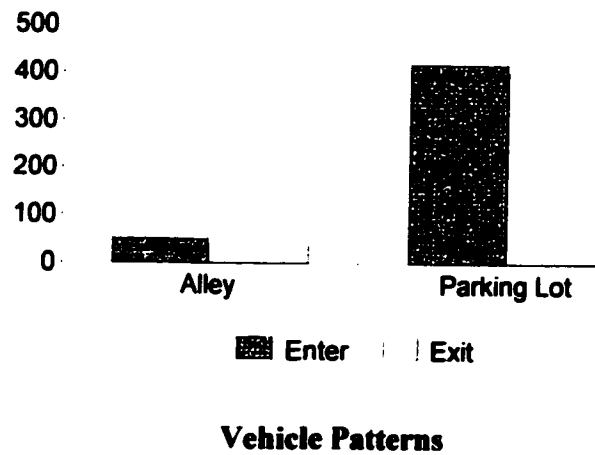
Vehicle Patterns.

Figure 3. Parking lot vehicle pattern broken down by driveway location at same complex.

### Informal Interviews Responses

Results of candid responses elicited within the bar scene during the course of data collection produced the following results as it applies to participants knowledge, perception, or awareness of the diminishing numbers of local bars (Table 4), and of any activity that may take place outside of the bar that relates to the parking lot (Table 5).

Table 4

Response to question, "Why are bars closing." (n=15).

<u>Response</u>	<u>Sum</u>
Do not know.	3
People are doing other things.	3
People go to San Francisco instead	3
People are settling down.	2
Bars a thing of the past.	2
People have moved.	1
People drink less.	1
Commercial rent for bars are too high.	1
People stay home more.	1
<u>Cities have been trying to close them down.</u>	<u>1</u>

Note. Several respondents provided multiple responses, all of which are reflected above. All but two participants were in the bar at the time the question was posed. One was outside of the bar, the other was at a gay establishment away from the bar.

Based upon earlier observations, there appears to be a level of activity--as evinced by the volume of traffic that is not related to persons patronizing the businesses--which indicates that the parking lot itself draws some people for reasons other than going the bar and its neighboring establishments. There are other people who tend to go back and forth between one or more of the businesses and the parking lot scene. Yet, there are others who go to the business establishments only without participation, or perhaps even full awareness, of the activity taking place in the parking lot. Information was obtained from

several persons within the bar to gauge their knowledge or perceptions of parking lot activity.

Table 5

Response to question, "What goes on in the parking lot." (n=7)

Parking Lot Activity	Sum
Sex	4
People are too young to get into the bar.	2
Its just another social scene.	1

**Note.** Under the category of sex, one respondent referred to it as anonymous, one referred to it as being non-committal, and two used the term "cruisy" to describe the parking lot. Cruise, cruising, and cruisy are colloquialisms referring to a method used by gay males to find others, especially for the purposes of having sex (Saghir & Robins, 1973, p. 68).

#### Focus Group Responses

The group engaged in an active conversation regarding the role of gay bars within the community. As a group, they agreed that they now feel more comfortable doing other things than just going out to gay bars. Two males expressed they are currently in a relationship, which has reduced the amount of time they spend in a bar. One male expressed that he would rather go up to San Francisco to go out because there are so many more places to go. Another male expressed that all of the bars in San Jose were so much alike so that going to one was like going to any other. Age was highlighted as a reason for going out less and most indicated that they use to go out more when they were younger. One lesbian that said she feels more comfortable going to a straight club than a gay male bar. While one other female agreed with this comment, three other females did not either agree or refute the statement. The gay male participants still felt straight clubs are intimidating.

Table 6

**Response of participants in group discussion about the decline of local gay bars.**

<b>Round Table Discussion</b>	
<b>Variable:</b>	<b>Result or effect:</b>
Internet	Meeting online, arrange to meet at places other than bars. For people growing up in the age of the Internet, it remains a focus of their social world.
Alternatives	Going to coffee shops, movies, and restaurants instead.
Behavior modification	Since onset of AIDS, bar attendance has decreased.
Demographic	As population gets older, less likely to spend time at bars.
Attitudes	Easier to make contacts outside of bars. Some lesbians feel comfortable going straight clubs, a few expressing that they feel more accepted there than at gay male clubs. Males did not share feeling of acceptance at straight clubs, still intimidating.
Economics	Shift and decline in job market, was once in high-tech, not any more due to cut backs, half of friends who he use to work with have moved out of area as a result of cut backs.
Social climate	Dichotomy of greater acceptance but growing conservatism. Some cities have continued to discourage gay bars, not renewing permits or revoking them to force gay clubs out. While more accepting, don't want visible element in their community.

**Interview Survey Responses**

The summary of responses to the survey (see Appendix B) indicates that the average participant has been going to gay bars for 10 years, was 22 years old when they first went to a gay bar, and now goes out about 25 times a year. Five go to the bar to dance, three also state they go out to meet people and to socialize. While at a bar, four



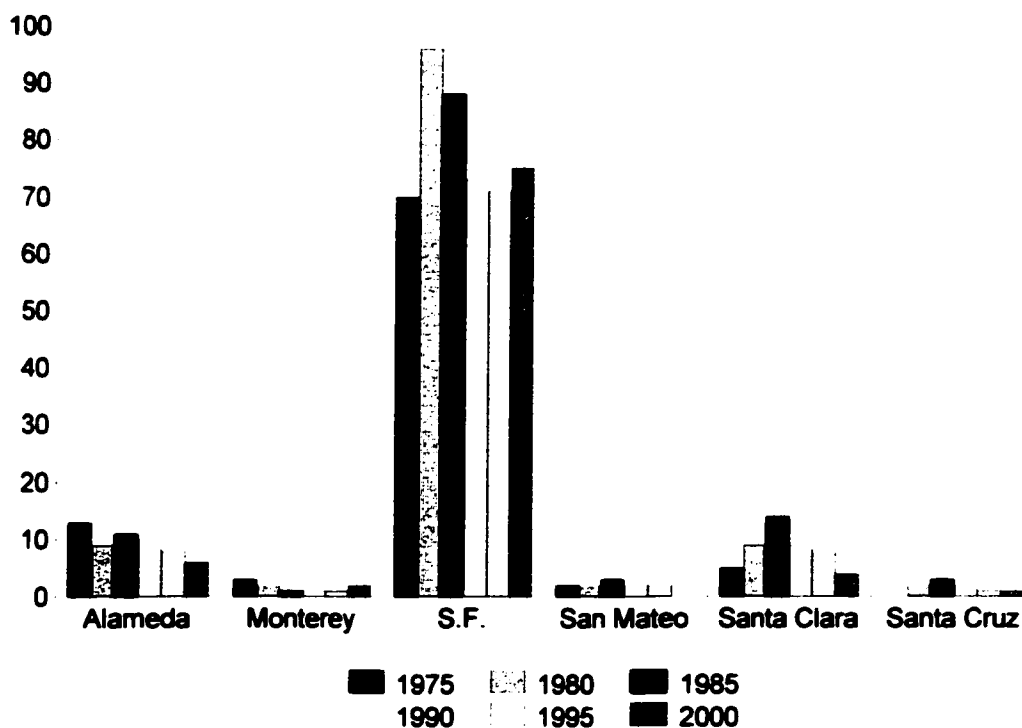
people indicate they drink, two also dance, and three of the five engage in cruising or flirting. When discussing their knowledge of parking lot activity, three participants used the word “cruise” or “cruisy” to describe it, two also used the word “sex,” two further referred to it as being “anonymous,” and two had used the term “straight” to differentiate the parking lot crowd from the bar crowd.

#### Number of Gay Bars

The greater San Francisco region saw a general pattern of stable growth in the number of gay male bars from 1975 to 1985, with an inverse pattern resulting in a real loss in the number of bars from 1985 to 2000.

Figure 4.

#### Gay Bars in San Francisco Area by County.



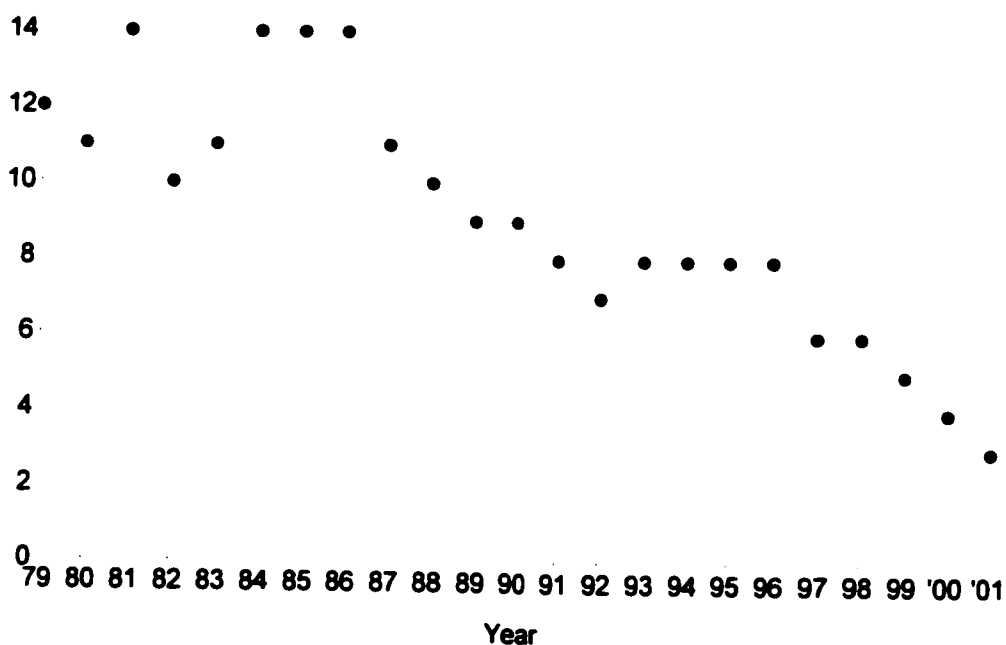
**Gay Bars in San Francisco Area by County**

**Figure 4.** Historical trend in the number of known gay males bars in the greater San Francisco region from 1975 through 2000. The number of gay bars in San Francisco has always exceeded all other surrounding areas even if they combined into a single group. While having shown a decrease from its peak in the early 1980s, as of 2000, San Francisco slightly exceeds its recorded number of bars for the years of 1975, 1990, and 1995. San Mateo County currently has no gay bars, San Jose has only three male gay bars, and Santa Cruz has only one that comes closest to be an exclusively gay bar.

The Santa Clara Valley has seen a marked pattern of growth and decline in the number of gay male bars, with the actual onset of its decline trailing San Francisco by several years.

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**Figure 5.**  
**Gay Male Bars in Santa Clara County.**



**Gay Male Bars In Santa Clara County**

**Figure 5.** Graph depicts the historical trend in the number of recorded gay male bars in Santa Clara County from 1979 to 2001.

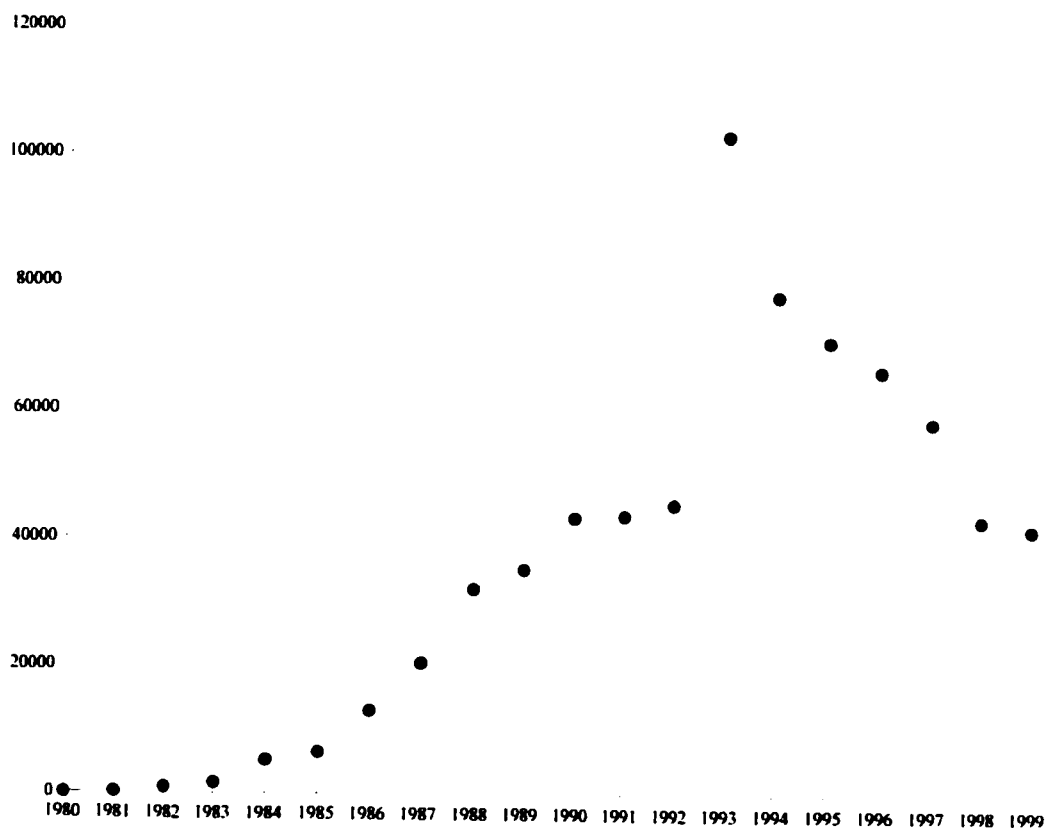
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**Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)**

Beginning in 1982, the National Center for Disease Control (CDC) began documenting reported cases of AIDS. From its onset, the incident of AIDS showed a continuous pattern of increasing numbers at an accelerating rate, marked by a sharp trajectory that peaked at over 102,000 newly reported cases in 1993, before then beginning a rapid descend that leveled off in 1999 to pre-1993 levels.

Figure 6.

**Reported AIDS Cases for the United States.**



**Reported AIDS Cases for the United States**

**Figure 6.** Graph depicting the historical trend in reported AIDS cases across the United States from 1980 through 1999, as reported by the CDC.

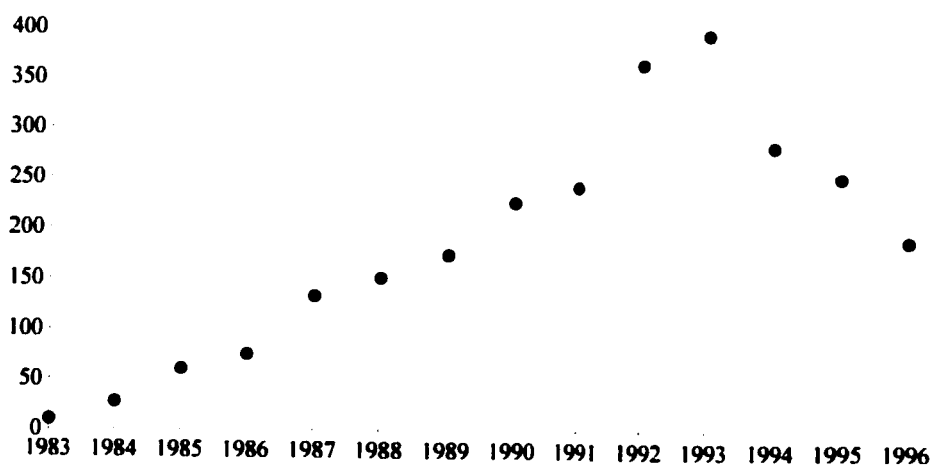
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**AIDS Cases in Santa Clara County**

Although San Jose is located less than 50 miles south of San Francisco--the latter being a city hit both early and hard in the AIDS crisis--the numbers of reported of AIDS cases in the Santa Clara Valley is significantly lower than those found in San Francisco. When compared with the trajectory of nationwide reported cases, it displays a similar pattern in its peak and descent. While ARIS (2001) asserts that the first cases of AIDS began to appear in Santa Clara County during 1985-1986, statistics from the Santa Clara County Public Health Department, as displayed in Figure 5, indicates that 10 cases of AIDS were diagnosed in Santa Clara County as early as 1983.

Figure 7.

**Reported AIDS Cases for Santa Clara County.**



**Reported AIDS Cases for Santa Clara County**

**Figure 7.** Depicts the cumulative number of AIDS Cases in Santa Clara County as published in the Santa Clara County 1997 Health Status Report by the Public Health Department of Santa Clara County.

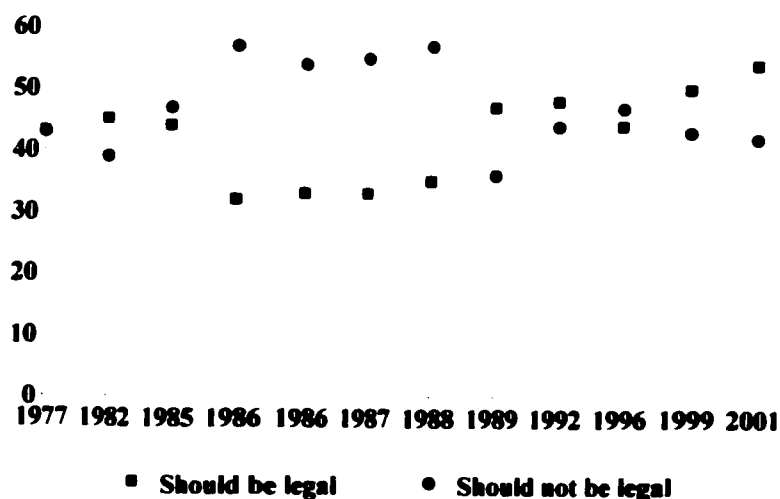
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### The Gallup Poll

The Gallup Poll asked the public's opinion on a series of questions on matters dealing with homosexuality from 1977 to 2001. Gallup's analysis of its poll results conclude that while there has been some positive change in public sentiment regarding homosexuality, the public still has some ambivalence towards matters dealing with acceptability or legality (Gallup, 2001). Currently, these numbers are more positive than negative, and the trend appears to be continuing in that direction most in areas of measure. While the differences are smaller in some of these areas of measure, Gallup (2001) reports that public opinion clearly favors equal employment rights for gays and lesbians, a number that has grown to 85%.

Figure 8.

### Gallup Poll on Homosexual Relations.



**Gallup Poll on Homosexual Relations**

**Figure 8.** Depicts the Gallup Poll results to the question, “Do you think homosexual relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal?”

**Note.** The Gallup Organization polled on this question twice in 1986, the first time between the dates of July 11 -14, and again between the dates of September 13-17.

### Unemployment Rate

The Employment Development Department of the State of California compiles and publishes unemployment rates by statistical area breakdown. Santa Clara County is included within the San Jose Metropolitan Statistical Area (EDD, 2002). According to the EDD, Santa Clara County employment decreased by 45,100 jobs between December 2000 and December 2001. Manufacturing accounted for the biggest decrease with the loss of 21,700 jobs, mostly in the electronic equipment and industrial machinery industries (EDD, 2001).



### **Unemployment Rate in Santa Clara County by Percentage**

**Figure 9.** Depicts the unemployment rate in Santa Clara County as reported by the State of California, Employment Development Department for the period of 1990 through 2001.

**Note.** According to the EDD, statistics for years prior to 1990 are not comparable to 1990 and later. As a result, no effort was made to include rates prior to 1990.

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## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Research reveals that the patronage patterns for the model bar is consistent with expectations that weekend nights would be busier than weekday nights (see Figure 1). The busiest night of the week is Friday. Saturday night--while consistently busier than weekday nights--displays a significant decrease in the number of patrons when compared to Friday. However, this study did not definitively established what the population of gay males in Santa Clara County are doing on Saturday night instead of going to the existing local bars. Some of the explanations given by participants for why they thought bars were closing are equally applicable to patronage patterns as well: (a) they tend to go out in another area, such as San Francisco; (b) they do other things instead, like going to a movie or dinner; (c) they stay home, or; (d) they have moved away. If the gay population of the Santa Clara Valley has either remained constant or increased along with the rise in the general population of this region, then some or all of these factors would have to be true in order to account for such a drastic reduction in the number of bars as well as the displacement in the number of patrons that had once frequented them.

Read (1980) observes that gay bars tend to be segregated by sex, and in the case of the study bar, the results are consistent with this finding (See Table 1). Without doubt, the clientele for this bar is almost exclusively male. Conversely, a visit to the one gay bar in Santa Cruz suggests a different sex composition of its patrons. Upon arrival, the crowd was estimated to consist of 60% male and 40% female. As the night grew later, more males began to arrive as some of the females departed. By midnight, the crowd was estimated to then consist of 70% male and 30% female. While this is based upon a one time observation as part of this study, past experience with this community suggest that this night was not an anomaly.



Although there was some spatial segregation by sex within the Santa Cruz bar, it was clear that the bar's crowd was far more sex integrated than the study bar in San Jose. It would be reasonable to conclude that a bar serving a smaller population that cannot support specialization, as in separate male and female bars, will tend to be more integrated. In larger population centers that can support separate bars, there would tend to be greater segregation evident. Given this premise, if the San Jose area was to experience any further erosion to the gay bar scene, then any future closure of a bar that caters to a specific sex could conceivably lead to increased integration at existing bars--albeit with resistance--given the entrenched nature of the existing level of segregation.

The tendency to segregate by sex is consistent with assertions that the gay and lesbian community is differentiated, to some degree, due to sex and gender differences. It is also consistent with the concept that one of the important roles that the gay bar plays is to regulate sexual relationships and that sexual motives underpin the purposes for males to frequent them, even if this motive is obscured behind a social pretense. Therefore, fraternizing with the opposite-sex serves little purpose towards that fulfillment, even if they happen to be part of the greater gay community.

The age of the bar's patrons suggest that the bar scene is skewed toward a younger crowd and the drop off in attendance accelerates as age increases (see Table 2). Certainly, the type of bar effects the age group that frequents a particular establishment. However, the decline in patronage by age would tend to support the contention that people "age out" of a bar phase, therefore participating less in the bar scene as they grow older. This may also bear some relationship to the findings by Sergio and Cody (1986) on the emphasis placed upon attractiveness by gay males, Hooker (1967) on the emphasis of appearance as a distinct feature of gay male bars, and Kates (2000) on the construction of gay male image, of which youthfulness is considered to be one of its key features. While

this study did not look at the matter of “ageism” (Henslin, 2000, p. 261), given the above implications, its inference within the gay and lesbian population is potentially compounded beyond that of the general population.

Activity within the bar is distributed in relation to the night of the week (see Table 3). On slower nights, the main bar and pool table are often the only focus of activity. Across all nights, they show a consistently high level of use. However, on Friday nights, the prevalence in use shifts to the dance floor, which comprises a usage rate that is two-times greater than the next highest measures representing bar and pool table activity. No inference on activity differences by age could be made based upon the data collected for this study.

The crowd is comprised of people who patronize the bar in varying degrees of frequency. Some patrons are considered regulars, persons who are there so often that they become recognizable (Cavan, 1966). One employee estimates that 60% of the customers are regulars, a number that could be further refined by what can be termed “hard core” regulars (Cavan, 1966, p. 208), a number estimated by this researcher to constitute about 30% of the patrons at the study bar. Observation also reveals that most regulars tend to follow a pattern of arriving and departing at somewhat predictable times. Further, many patrons appear to establish a territory within the bar, an area of preference where they spend a significant amount of their time.

The pool table represents one such territory within the bar, with acquaintanceship groups being evident among many of those regulars who frequently play and watch the game. However, the pool table also represents a visual distraction--as does the dance floor--for those who may watch, but are otherwise non-participants in these activities. As such, one can appear to be watching pool while engaged in subtle cruising, or it can merely serve to legitimize one's presence within the bar scene even if they are disengaged

with the more obvious social processes. A certain amount of bar behavior appears to be highly ritualized, whether one is either a frequent or occasional patron, and when present, either an active or passive participant. Casual observation suggest that for some patrons, merely being present in the bar scene provides a necessary sense of social connection, even if they are typically disinclined to socialize with others.

For the purposes of this study, the term “acquaintainship” group is used in place of “friendship,” since the level of involvement, and whether it extends beyond the bar scene itself, was not within the scope of this study. Casual observation suggests that many bar relationships are superficial, situational, and exist mostly within the context of the bar setting. With this having been acknowledged, the “hard core” pool table users appear to be more closely allied than any other acquaintainship group regularly observed within this particular bar.

While sexual interest may be ever-present, its expression within the bar is mostly subdued. Overt displays of intimacy was not regularly observed, however, minor displays of affection, such as discrete touching and kissing, were. Groping and overtly suggestive behavior appears to be discouraged and people were observed being admonished by the bar staff on several occasions when their behavior was felt to be inappropriate. Cavan (1966) reports there was a strong taboo against affection in gay bars during the 1960s--due to illegality of homosexuality at that time--and that it was the subject of negative sanction from both bartenders and regular patrons alike out of concern of drawing the attention of police and liquor regulatory authorities.

To some extent, the concern today is similar, however, it is a concern that is more generalized to matters of nudity, sex, and drug use that can threaten any legitimate bar’s license and operating permits, regardless if it caters to a straight or gay clientele. Nevertheless, some respondents expressed the belief that police and other regulatory

agencies have targeted gay bars with the intent of displacing them from their jurisdictions. Besides obvious legal issues, a functional purpose of enforcing a code of behavior may result from the convergence of respectability and legitimation so that a proper social scene is clearly contrasted from more tawdry scenes, such as some respondents have suggested the parking lot represents. This gay bar is a place where one makes contacts that may lead to sexual relations, with the latter being expected to manifested itself elsewhere.

Several studies reveal that as a population group, there tends to be a higher prevalence in the use of alcohol among gays and lesbians when compared to the general public. However, there is some disagreement if that use represents increased levels of moderate or heavy drinking. The dependence upon bars as a primary gathering place is frequently cited as a potential factor in higher alcohol use within this community, although Nardi (1982) does not believe that opportunity due to environment alone is a sufficient explanation (Nardi, 1982). Rather, Nardi (1982) feels that learning theory is perhaps the best explanation for increased alcohol use, which is tied to matters of socialization, the latter being a foremost purpose of the gay bar. As such, people do not go to the bar for the primary purpose of seeking alcohol, rather, they go to the bar because it is their community's primary social environment, thus alcohol use has become incidentally incorporated as part of their social function.

An early observation made during interior observation resulted in an estimate that 75-80% of the patrons order alcohol type drinks almost immediately upon entering this bar. In further testing the relation between drinking and bar patronage, data collected on two occasions revealed that 56 out of 81 persons, or about 70%, ordered a drink within a few minutes of entering the bar, most having placed their order immediately upon entry. This may seem to be an unremarkable fact given that it is a liquor serving establishment.

However, it must be viewed within the context of the gay bar as a social institution, not merely as a drinking environment. With this understood, if the bar exists to provide for the needs of its subculture in the absence of other socially acceptable alternatives, then it would be erroneous to conclude that its main functional purpose is to merely dispense alcohol and that everyone who patronizes the establishment does so because it is their desire to obtain it. Rather, the main motivation must center on the social processes that unfold, namely, forms of socialization and fraternization that are perceived as being mostly unavailable outside of this setting. Therefore, the mere presence in a bar environment is not the primary initiator of increased alcohol dependency, rather, it is a combination of dynamic factors in which social processes play the principal role.

Data collected during exterior observation indicates that a significant amount of vehicle traffic appears to bear little primary relationship to the patronage of the business establishments (see Figures 2 & 3). When asked about their knowledge of what takes place in the parking lot, several respondents answered, "sex" (see Table 5). While some covert sexual activity may actually take place in the parking lot, it should be stressed that the parking lot is used primarily as a place to meet people for the purposes of having sex that appears to take place elsewhere. In many ways, the parking lot is merely an alternative social scene to the bar, since the purpose of those involved with the parking lot is ultimately not too dissimilar to the desires or expectations of those inside the bar. A significant distinction between the parking lot and the bar is that the latter is a social scene in which the participants' success is based largely part upon their performance (Goffman, 1963), appearance (Sergios and Cody, 1986), and factors pertaining to sociability (Allen and Oleson, 1999).

The parking lot, while not exactly parallel with the setting and motivations discussed by Humphreys (1970), provides an environment that is free of many of the

social pretensions that are found within the bar. Therefore, it is conceivable that some of the parking lot participants are individuals who do not have the necessary social skills, or do not possess a firmly established gay identity, with either factor being essential in order to successfully navigate the bar scene. As such, the desire or drive to engage in certain sexual behavior without the acquisition of necessary skills or a firmly acquired gay identity would likely discourage participation in the bar scene. This would be consistent with several respondents who used the word “straight” to describe the difference between those who frequent the parking lot from those who go to the bar (see Table 5).

The desire of those who are not fully recognized as being gay, and the presence of bar participants, some of whom desire to meet others for sex regardless of who or where--and perhaps tired of trying to compete in the games that typically unfold within the bar--creates a complimentary situation in which motivation transcends issues of identity. For parking lot participants who do not possess a fully acquired gay identity, the proximity of the lot to both gay and non-gay businesses may represent a zone of transition, where by they can get close to a gay scene they do not fully identify with, associate with some who are part of that gay scene, and also satisfy homosexual desires while maintaining enough separation to mitigate difference between conflicts in their identity boundaries. This would be consistent with the model of linear stages of gay identity acquisition suggested by Cass (1983), and the assertion of Cox and Gallois (1996) that during such an identity acquisition, experimentation with same-sex encounters occur which may move one from a homosexual identity that is tentative to one that is tolerated.

Most studies conclude that gay bars fulfill a need to have an exclusive environment where socialization can take place. This study further examines the implications of multiple factors and how they may have acted--whether independently or

in concert--to influence the status of the gay bar as a social institution. It was during the era of gay liberation--circa 1970s--the number of known gay bars began to significantly increase (see Figures 4 & 5). This trend continued until the mid 1980s, when a noticeable reversal in the number bars is observed. This corresponds with the advent of the AIDS crisis, when the number of gay bars began to decline just as the number of reported AIDS cases were increasing (see Figures 6 & 7). Since the bar scene is also a place where sexual relationships are often initiated, the pattern of declining number of bars with the drastic upward slope in the number of AIDS cases is neither unexpected, nor likely coincidental. Fitzgerald (1986) noted that the AIDS epidemic invoked response that served to transform the gay community. One of those responses was a modification of excessive behaviors, which previously included promiscuous sex and excessive uses of drugs and alcohol. What Fitzgerald (1986) termed a "sexual free-for-all" experienced by gay males during the era of gay liberation had come to an abrupt halt (p. 56).

It was also during the early to mid-1980s--the incipient stage of the AIDS epidemic--that the public's opinion of homosexuality also showed a marked pattern of disapproval (see Figure 8). Towards the end of the 1980s, as the number of AIDS cases began an upward trajectory at an alarming rate, there was a reversal in the public's disapproval of homosexuality as the approval ratings became more positive than negative. The initial reaction of increased disapproval towards gays--the population group mostly affected by AIDS--is a foreseeable reaction to the fear that was generated by this medical crisis across all population groups, especially at the early phase when medical knowledge about the cause and mode of transmission for this disease was practically non-existent. As medical knowledge advanced and the public became more educated on the nature of the threat, the reactionary response indicated by increased disapproval gave way to a more enlightened--and perhaps compassionate--attitude towards a long stigmatized population

group that was in the throes of a decimating medical crisis. As it relates to the incipient stages of AIDS and the increase in disapproval ratings, this pattern infers a substantive significance between these two factors.

As a community, the gay subculture responded to the fear of AIDS by reducing some of its obvious indulgences. The bar, being one of the most visible and symbolic institutions, experienced a significant decline in patronage. This decline in the number of bars is consistent with the rapid increase in the number of AIDS cases and the trends in these two factors also appear to be substantively significant. Further, the upswing in the public's disapproval of homosexuality and the beginning of the AIDS crisis also appears to have some relationship, as do the decreasing number of bars and the rapid increase in the number of AIDS diagnoses. However, a direct relationship between the declining number of bars and increasing public approval may be obscured unless one looks at the implications of greater acceptance in terms of assimilation. Assimilation theory argues that as a subculture group develops inclusiveness with the mainstream, it begins to lose some of its unique cultural markers that originally developed in response to its exclusion. The decline of gay bars may potentially serve as a measure of growing inclusion into mainstream society, thereby indicating less dependence upon an exclusive environment to meet its social needs.

The Internet has also been offered by some respondents as a possible explanation for why gays and lesbians are growing less dependent upon bars as a primary social focus. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the use of the Internet is significant, however, no empirical research has conducted as part of this study that either supports or refutes this contention. Nevertheless, the vast amount of services and information that is readily available online, coupled with the common place status of the computer and the



increasing reliance upon its use, gives credence to the concept that virtual aspects of cyberculture can replace tactile aspects of traditional social institutions.

Employment factors, particularly the relationship between the high-technology sector and Silicon Valley, offers another potential area for analysis as it applies to specific regional factors that may influence the size of a target population and any resultant change that is disproportionate to the trend in the general population within the same area. A recent study suggests that a leading indicator of an area's high technology success is a large gay population (Florida and Gates, 2001).

The 1990s has been witness to a decline in the electronic and manufacturing sectors within the Santa Clara County, as marked by two periods of significant rates of unemployment (see Figure 9). The potential exists that there is some relationship, even if weak, between the continuing decline in the number of gay bars and the decline of the high technology industry within Silicon Valley. The implications of an economic factor is two-fold. First, it relates to a possible decline in the local gay population from job loss and relocation to other regions where jobs and affordable housing can still be found. Secondly, loss of disposable income from decline of wealth due to job loss may serve to curtail some discretionary expenditures for those who remain but find themselves having to work at occupations where they earn less income. In addition to this recent drift in employment, Santa Clara County is also known for its high cost of living, which according to the Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network, has increased by 20% since 1993 (Joint, 2002).

Finally, researchers such as Bagley and Tremley (1998) and D'Emilio (1983) have noted the phenomena of gay migration--typically within the context of moving from sparse to populous environments--particularly when the latter has an established gay community. Despite the large general population of Silicon Valley, which actually

exceeds that of San Francisco, the gay social scene, and perhaps the gay population itself. has experienced an obvious decline. In contrast, while San Francisco has seen a slight decline in the number of gay bars from its highest peak in 1980, the omnipresence in its current number of gay bars stands in stark contrast to the few that can still be found in San Jose. Therefore, regardless of which factor(s) served as the initial catalyst for the drastic decline in the number of gay bars in Santa Clara County, as their numbers declined and the gay social scene receded, this area has become increasingly less attractive for those who desire immersion into an active gay social environment.

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that some migration has ensued in which gays and lesbians have relocated to other gay population centers that still offer a more lively and exclusive gay social scene. Resultantly, this would leave behind an older crowd that is less likely to regularly frequent the bar and more likely to be in relationships. This is consistent with the assertion of several respondents who felt that people are settling down, getting into relationships, and/or aging out of the bar scene. It is also reasonably to conclude that the younger gay crowd that remains within this area is more likely to either commute to San Francisco to partake in an active bar scene, or they have integrated non-gay activities as part of their social experience.

## CONCLUSION

The Gay and Lesbian community arose from a stigmatized subculture whose true ascent towards legitimation began during the mid twentieth-century. During this time, bars had developed into a primary location where homosexuals, among others who engaged in behavior that was considered less than honorable by prevailing social standards, could gather without experiencing the contempt they would likely endure beyond the bar's physical dimension. However, the gathering of people within a spatial confine, some of whom engage in like behaviors, does not itself constitute a subculture. For many, it was not so much of a matter of being known as a homosexual as it was to possess a desire that sometimes manifested itself in same-sex behavior. Most tried to "pass" as part of mainstream society once in they were functioning outside the confines of the bar (Goffman, 1963).

It was not until the aggregate of persons sharing a similar propensity towards same-sex behavior congregated in sufficient numbers that like minded individuals were able to externalized their sense of commonality to a degree sufficient to lead to the adoption of similar attitudes, values, and beliefs. It was only through a such shared understanding of their similarities in life that the conditions would arise allowing for the transformation of this aggregate of individuals into a recognizable subculture group.

The impetus for this change in the status of homosexuals appears to be related to the rampant growth of urban centers as a result of industrialization, with a corresponding shift in populations from small towns and rural areas into rapidly enlarging cities that became the center of social life. As mass society left behind the prudish standards of the Victorian era, the fortuity in the convergence of factors provided the social climate in which a scorned pattern of behavior could be gradually transformed into a recognized social category.

The evolution of the gay and lesbian subculture has allow its members to assume a more visible role in society due to increased tolerance, which in turn has fostered mainstream incorporation. The process of incorporation, having contributed to the legitimation of status, is analogous to the process of assimilation. As the gay community experiences assimilation, they are gradually adopting more mainstream attitudes and values thus shedding some of the unique markers that have traditionally delineated their subculture from the mainstream. However, despite this apparent increase in tolerance towards gays and lesbians, there still remains some degree of reticence on the part of society to allow for their full inclusion. Conversely, elements within the gay and lesbian community are also resistant to the full adoption of mainstream attitudes, values, and beliefs.

Bars, having traditionally fulfilled the role of a social institution by providing the spatial context from where the gay subculture has largely emerged, are gradually having the significance of this role challenged. Multiple factor appear to have converged during the 1980s and 1990s--some that on the surface appear to bear little or no relationship with one another--all of which may have served to diminish the status of the gay bar as a social institution. Specifically, among these factors are included: AIDS, changes in public attitude toward homosexuality, the advent of the Internet, assimilation, and even potential shifts in employment rates and the cost of living, have all had the potential to effect bar patronage in Santa Clara County.

There are several areas that have not been fully explored, but which have implications for future research in the social processes that effect the gay community. This includes the prevalence in the use of the Internet and its supplanting of traditional means of obtaining information and engaging in socialization, particularly for the gay and lesbian population. Further, matters dealing with possible shifts in the population of

specific groups due to their association with a particular industry--such as gays and high technology--may help to explain regional changes in the population of a subculture that is disproportionate to the trend of the general population for the same area.

Where the bar once represented one of the few available social venues for gays to interact with others of a similar proclivity, data suggests that a growing number of alternatives are replacing the exclusivity of the gay bar as a preeminent social institution. Therefore, various measures, as observed within the scope of this study, support the contention that the gay and lesbian community is experiencing greater acceptance in mainstream society and that the gay bar has experiencing a decline in its status as a social institution. Within the context of Silicon Valley, this has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of gay bars and a diminishing gay social scene. Despite its decline as a social institution, the bar's position has been so firmly established as part of the tradition of this community that within the context of many individuals, the gay bar will always remain a significant point of reference for how they came to acquire their gay identity.

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## Appendix A

Sites database information for recorded gay bars in Santa Clara County obtained from the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco

641 Club		1977	2000
Alfonso's Sundowner		1976	1979
Alfonso's-Park Ave.		1977	1978
Bitter		1976	1978
Bootrack		1979	1987
Camelot		1975	1978
Cameo Club Caberet		1973	1974
Candy Shop		1974	1976
Cat's		1972	1976
Countryman's		1976	
Crystal Cafe		1963	1969
Crystal Saloon		1976	1978
Desperado's		1976	1985
El Patio		1976	1977
Everywoman's		1978	1979
Garden		1972	1985
Graduate		1975	1976
Harbor		1972	1975
Hi-Life		1967	1969
Interlude		1966	1984
Jock's		1977	1978
Kampi		1979	
Kennisons		1972	1976
Kona Kai		1972	1974
Mac's		1950	
Magnolia's Closet		1972	1976
Mecca		1975	1976
Paragon Garden		1976	1976
Piedmont		1960	1965
Plateau Seven		1970	1971
Plymouth House		1966	1973
Red Boar		1975	1983
Renegade's		1978	
Reno Club		1979	
Sapphire Lounge	1950s		
Savoy		1971	
Shack		1972	1976
Silver Dollar Saloon		1972	1983
St. Michael's Alley		1966	
Tinker's Damn		1971	
Tommy's or Stella's	1940s		
Whiskey Gulch		1977	1986

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**Appendix B****Responses to seven question survey**

1. How long have you been going to gay bars?

- a. First went 12 years ago..
- b. Since about 1994.
- c. For about a few years. Not long.
- d. Only here twice, gay bars for 10 years. I usually frequent the South of Market (S.F.) area.
- e. Almost 20 years.

2. How old were you when first started going to gay bars and how did you find out about them?

- a. 21 years old. It was word of mouth.
- b. 21 years old. Gay friends introduced me to all of the bars.
- c. 21 years old . I went with some friends.
- d. 33 years old. I knew this was the meeting place for people like me.
- e. 18 years old. From my mother.

3. How often do you go to the bar and is that more or less than when you first started going out?

- a. 2-3 times a month, usually to the City, This is a huge increase from when I first started going out.
- b. Currently less than a few times a year.
- c. About once a month. Not too often.
- d. Steady once or twice a week.
- e. Once every three months or so, when I first came out, I use to go out every Thursday. Friday, Saturday. Less now.

4. Why do you go to the bar and what do you expect to happen while you are there?
- a. Now its just to dance. Before meeting my boyfriend, it was to cruise.
  - b. Dance and meet people, socialize.
  - c. Good music, cute guys, drinking, usually go expecting to be ignored because gay men are so selective. Basically I go to dance.
  - d. See friends, meet new people. No particular expectations or anything special has to happen.
  - e. Have fun, dance, meet friend, when younger to meet guys.
5. What is the typical night at the bar like? What do you do when you are there?
- a. An hour of drinking and/or pot smoking. Then its dancing until close.
  - b. Standing around talking and drinking. Rarely dance.
  - c. Drinking, smoke cigarettes outside, see men wearing tight shirts
  - d. Talking to friends, cruise, and drink.
  - e. Check out scene, flirt with cute guys, dance 3-4 hours, looking for a relationship.
6. Do you know about any activities that take place in the parking lot, and does the activity or people differ from what goes on inside the bar?
- a. Very typically cruisy, anonymous sex.
  - b. Lot very busy, can't differentiate people between inside and out, outside a bit creepy, possibly straight people cruising who would rather remain anonymous.
  - c. Has a reputation for being too cruisy. Always guys in lot looking for fun even when the bar is closed.
  - d. Activities are slightly different but people are the same, just behave differently.
  - e. Guys having sex, both inside and outside. Also drugs and drinking.

**7. Is there anything else that you can tell me about your experiences or perceptions of the bar, gay life, or the parking lot scene that would help me with my research?**

- a. Certain bars have reputations (real or perceived) that some are just for dancing, some cruising, some are for other specific things.**
- b. Impression that its an older crowd. Don't feel need to go out as often. San Jose bar scene almost non-existent, too young or too old.**
- c. I would like to think that some gay that don't have their noses in the air.**
- d. Activities happening outside the bar are interesting and challenging to me. There are risk involved (safe though) but this is what excite me and make them fun to me.**
- e. As I have gotten older, perception about gay bars has changed. I know go there less and less. I have never been one for casual sex.**