

tion that the Union became a "Burkean entity."

73. See Carl G. Gustafson, *The Institutional Drive* (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 1966), ch. VI, on the process of institutionalization; and Dennison, *Dorr War*, pp. 193-205.

74. See Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (reprint; Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 218; Merrill D. Peterson, *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 88, 209-26; Roscoe Pound, *The Spirit of American Law*

(Boston: Marshall Jones Co., 1931), esp. p. 154; Herman Belz, "The Constitution in the Gilded Age: The Beginnings of Critical Realism in American Scholarship," *American Journal of Legal History*, XIII, 2 (Apr. 1969), esp. pp. 111-12; Bennett, *Theories of Federalism*, pp. 169-76, 179-95; and Scott Buchanan's comment about the "real republic until the Civil War," *Embers of the World*, ed. Harris Wofford, Jr. (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1970), p. 50.

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Gay Bars and the Emergence of the Denver Homosexual Community

Our society has reserved one of its strongest prejudices for homosexuals. In an age when the rights of ethnic minorities, women, and even criminals are being expanded, the gay subculture is still often treated with ridicule, scorn, social ostracism, legal harassment, and the denial of civil rights. In response to this discrimination, the gay community has remained largely underground where it has found its major haven in the gay bar. It is hoped that a case study of the homosexuals and their bar life in one city, Denver, will add to the limited scholarly knowledge of this little understood subculture. It may also provide some insight into the stigmatization-alienation-ghettoization process which social scientists have been exploring during the last two decades in connection with other minority groups.

Psychiatrists, sociologists, psychologists, novelists, and other students of the gay world have agreed that the gay bar is the center of the homosexual subculture's activities.¹ As a permissive and protective institution, the gay bar offers patrons segregation from the larger society and a place where social taboos can be violated safely and respectably.² In addition, the gay bar functions as a recruiting station where individuals are first exposed to homosexuality. These taverns also serve as the "coming out" scene where people may first publicly announce their homosexuality, as a homosexual market place where courting and sexual contracts transpire, and as a multifunctional gay community center where activities are planned and gays exchange insights on how to deal with the disapproval of the straight world. In recent years, the gay bar has also become a command post where militant homosexuals have mapped out protest campaigns and crusades for gay civil rights.

The first part of this article surveys the history of Denver's homosexual community. The second part deals with the gay bars that serve as a haven for this group. The third part explores some of the functions of Denver's gay bars. First, however, a word on methodology is in order.

This article is based on a search of the local and national literature available on the homosexual subculture and on a participant-observer study of Denver's gay bars. Between 1972 and 1976, the author systematically conducted a personal investigation of 29 gay bars operating during that period within the City and County of Denver. Every bar known to be patronized primarily by either male or female homosexuals was visited at least once. Generally, the research expeditions were made with gay companions. Only on a few occasions was the researcher alone or with straight friends. Data was overtly and covertly compiled inside the bar and immediately afterwards. On several

expeditions, gay bar proprietors, bartenders, and customers were interviewed.

The data collected and the conclusions reached have been submitted to several long-time, active members of the Denver gay community. A founder of the Denver Gay Coalition, and a gay bar proprietor and first president of the Colorado Gay Tavern League, were generous with their time and helpful with their suggestions. As a "straight" outsider, the researcher has relied heavily on these two and other gay friends for an introduction to the gay world. This article reflects, in part, their experiences and insights, although some independent conclusions have been drawn. Observations and conclusions have been reexamined, whenever possible, in the light of local and national literature on the subject. It must be added that the nature and status of the homosexual community is rapidly changing and that these observations attempt to survey gay activities in Denver only for the period prior to 1976.

HISTORY OF THE DENVER HOMOSEXUAL COMMUNITY

Unearthing nineteenth century homosexual history is not easy.³ During that century and during much of our own, homosexuality was treated as an "unspeakable" and largely unprintable subject. It surfaces vaguely only in a few nineteenth century Denver newspaper articles on "crimes against nature." One 1885 story linked an alleged homosexual with what may possibly have been an early gay bar:

One of the most outrageous and debasing of all crimes came to the notice of the police last night about 10 o'clock. . . . A lad 15 years old was looking for employment, he was enticed by a man who came out of 'Moses' Home,' a saloon on Fifteenth Street near Larimer, to accompany him, and he would procure him a situation where he could earn \$20 a month and his board. They went together down into the brush near the railroad track back of Mullen's flouring mill. Arriving at the place the man picked up a heavy stick and compelled the boy to take off his clothing. The man, or more properly, the fiend, then committed on the boy that which the statutes describe as a crime against nature, and other revolting outrages of a similar character.

Half a dozen plainclothesmen "scoured" the city looking for the "fiend" before finding him in the Moses' Home.⁴

Favorable conditions for homosexuality were provided by Denver's nineteenth century demographic make-up with its preponderance of young, sexually aggressive males. The almost exclusively male life in the mining camps, on railroad crews, in the military, and among cowboys probably fostered homosexual practices.⁵ A French visitor to Denver in 1867 noted the common hotel and boarding house practice of two male sleepers occupying one bed at a time.⁶

In Denver, the combination of a predominantly male population and great numbers of juvenile vagrants may have promoted homosexual liaisons, commercial or otherwise. A pioneer Denver physician warned fellow doctors about the evils of "male prostitution" in an 1882 address to the Colorado Medical Society.⁷

A large, impoverished class provided a recruiting grounds for male prostitutes. "There are more criminals among the boys than among the men," claimed the *Denver Tribune*. "Denver is full of these boys, who come here mostly from San Francisco, and the eastern cities, having made their way by persistent stealing, from one town to another." These street urchins, the reporter concluded, "quite destroy the idyllic pastoral nonsense so universally preached and quoted everywhere about the purity and innocence of everything in this country."⁸

Such articles can only suggest the presence of homosexuality and gay bars in the nineteenth century. Not until the twentieth century, evidently, did taverns call themselves, or the press report the existence of, gay bars. In Denver, there was apparently no exclusively gay tavern until 1939. That year, a pioneer short-lived gay bar, the Pit, opened on Seventeenth Street in the heart of downtown.⁹ It was not until after World War II, however, that gay bars and a visible gay community became well established in Denver. As one psychiatrist and pioneer scholar of homosexuality has noted, American gay bars largely originated during and immediately after World War II.¹⁰ The mobilization of millions of men into a womanless world and the general loosening of morals during wartime fostered homosexuality in military barracks and bars.

This was the case with Denver's first well-established gay bar. During the Second World War, Mary's Tavern on Broadway became a favorite hangout of military personnel. One charter member of the Denver Gay Coalition and student of homosexual history claims that this bar "was liberated by airmen from Lowry Air Force Base. It was patronized by a group that went in repeatedly and was blatantly gay in behavior. At first they were thrown out or arrested. But they kept returning and eventually straight customers began going elsewhere."¹¹

This was only the first of several homosexual taverns to open after the war. By 1949, the *Denver Post* claimed that homosexuality in the city had reached "an all-time high."¹² Another article blamed the development on "the speeded up tempo of postwar living." It was also reported that homosexual activity was concentrated in the Civic Center on Broadway and that "these loiterers will freely admit they are members of the 'unmentionable minority'—the homosexually inclined."¹³ It was added that "police say a large proportion of this group was made up of military personnel in the area." The military was not unaware of this; by 1965, six of Denver's eight gay bars had been placed off-limits by the Armed Forces Disciplinary Control Board.¹⁴

Captain William Sanders, Chief of the Vice Bureau in the 1950's, reported that "Denver—like any other metropolitan area—has homosexuals and always is going to have them. . . . Homosexuals will 'infiltrate' a tavern. . . . Several will appear at a tavern and being good spenders the owner doesn't mind. But before he knows it homosexuals are his only patrons. Then he will call us to run them off."¹⁵

Although homosexuals had made their barroom beachhead, they were far from welcome in the Mile High City. Even the press, which has frequently

championed minority rights, balked on this issue. In a 1965 editorial which started out with an apology for bringing up the subject, the *Denver Post* claimed that the "extent of homosexual activity in Denver" made it necessary to alert the citizenry. "The city can—and must—make certain that the Denver homosexual community is contained and restricted, that Denver does not become known as a haven for homosexuals," the *Post* declared. That newspaper's suggestion was to beef up the Vice Bureau, which it claimed "is an expense the citizens of the community would gladly bear." Yet the *Post* had had reservations about closing the city's gay bars, which had grown to eight by that time. "If the bars were closed," the paper reasoned, "the homosexuals would be reduced to carrying on their activities more openly in the public parks and in the public streets" where homosexuals "could not be as easily observed or contained by the police."¹⁶

Nine years later, the *Post* had not changed its attitude in its first entertainment section review of a gay bar. In delicately chosen words, the *Post* warned Denverites that the live entertainment at the Broadway Cabaret was "too narrow in scope" and that "the main thrust of his act is directed towards an audience predisposed to like him, and there might be some question as to how he would fare with a mixed crowd."¹⁷ As of 1975, this leading Denver newspaper refused to use the word "gay" in its advertising copy.¹⁸

Social stigmatization of the gay community became a major institutional task of the Vice Bureau of the Denver Police Department. Arrests were made on the basis of three city ordinances prohibiting "lewd" acts, "indecent" acts, and "lewd, wanton, or lascivious conduct," which carried a combined maximum fine of \$900 and 270 days in jail.¹⁹ A 1973 Gay Coalition study presented to City Council claimed that "all of the arrests made of homosexuals during the first three months of the year were made for soliciting, not for homosexual acts [and] that 99.1% of homosexual arrests stem from conversations with vice bureau officials and not from citizen complaints."²⁰ In city council hearings, Gay Coalition attorneys maintained that "officers sometimes engaged homosexuals in leading conversations for fifteen minutes before the homosexual offered to perform a lewd act."²¹

Evidence in gay arrest cases consisted of observations scribbled down by the arresting officers, who infiltrated bars and posed as patrons. For example:

Arresting officers were on routine homosexual surveillance at the Hilton Hotel. Officer D_____ was engaged in conversation with Def about winter sports. The conversation was diverted to bedroom sports and the Def said 'I like to fuck.' Def said 'I like men most & I like to fuck, suck and get sucked.' Officer D_____ identified himself as a police officer and advised Def of his rights.²²

Not only suggesting lewd acts to vice squad members, but dancing with and kissing another gay could lead to arrest: "Def sitting at bar hugging N_____ and kissing him in the process. Def grabbed N_____ and was fondling him."²³ No complaint was made by the bar owner, employees, or customers. Nor did N_____, the recipient of affection, complain. Indeed, because N_____ accepted these advances, he was jailed as an "accomplice" in the "crime." On the complaint of the two vice squad officers, the

defendant was jailed, fined \$35, and suffered the social and occupational consequences that such a criminal record may excite. On another occasion, two men dancing the "bump" were arrested, forced to spend the night in jail, as they lacked the \$100 bail, and fined \$50 each for "public indecency."²⁴ According to the 1973 Gay Coalition study, about fifty such arrests were made each month during the early 1970's.

Condemned by the press and persecuted by the police, the gay community turned to Denver's mayor, Thomas G. Currigan. When pressed on the issue in 1965, Mayor Currigan replied:

I have taken an oath to uphold the constitution and the laws of the United States and the State of Colorado and the charter and ordinances of the City and County of Denver. That includes upholding the law against homosexuality, which is in violation of natural law, as well as the man-made regulations controlling it. If and when legislation is passed changing society's official position toward homosexuality, I will review my stand on the matter. Until that happens, however, I will not discuss or debate this question with anyone. I trust this will terminate our correspondence of now.²⁵

The Denver city council was accused of a similar refusal to deal with homosexuals in an October 1973 hearing attended by some 300 gays and gay sympathizers. A spokesman for the Gay Coalition told the city council, "I think the issue is that the City Council has failed to accept its responsibility to the gay community. I think at issue is that you people are sitting there and you don't want to talk about it. You don't want to deal with it."²⁶

Dismissed by both mayor and council, the gays turned to the Colorado Civil Rights Commission. While admitting that there are "over 200,000 homosexual Colorado men who, as the state's second largest minority should be represented," the Commission nevertheless voted in 1975 to "postpone" sponsorship of a Gay Civil Rights Package.²⁷ The preceding year, gays also suffered rejection in the supposedly liberal university town of Boulder, Colorado. Voters there defeated by a two-to-one margin a gay equal employment rights city charter amendment. Boulder city councilmen who dared to support the proposal were subsequently dismissed in a recall election.²⁸

Denver homosexuals became increasingly militant after suffering these setbacks. As early as 1958, Denver gays had organized the city's pioneer homosexual rights group, the Mattachine (Italian for "Little Jester") Society. This group held a national Mattachine Society convention in the Albany Hotel, where they focused on discrimination against gays. Soon after this convention, however, Denver's Mattachine Society dropped out of sight.²⁹

In 1973, the Denver gay community rallied to form the Denver Gay Coalition and began a somewhat successful crusade to enlarge society's tolerance. The Denver movement followed similar developments in New York and San Francisco, where increasingly militant and large gay groups were adopting the confrontation strategies used successfully by other minority groups during the 1960's. The Denver group traced its roots to New York, where the first Gay Coalition was formed in 1969 in the aftermath of the Stonewall riot. The Stonewall was a Greenwich Village gay bar raided in the early morning hours by police. The clientele were ordered out of the bar and the manager and em-

ployees were arrested. As the police emerged from the bar they were pelted with beer cans by disgruntled patrons and driven back into the Stonewall, which was then locked from the outside. The riot police arrived and after several hours of street fighting, a few beatings, and numerous arrests, order was restored. The following evening, aroused gays, Black Panthers, Yippies, and others congregated under "Gay Power" banners with plans to "liberate" Christopher Street (the major gay bar row in the Village). The result was another riotous night and a return bout with the police. Out of this incident emerged the Gay Liberation movement.³⁰

A less dramatic, earlier incident had served to mobilize San Francisco gays. A 1964 gay benefit ball, which had been cleared in advance with City Hall, was nevertheless crashed by police. The officers broke into the locked hall and took photographs of the participants despite protests from lawyers present that it was a private affair and that the police had no warrants.³¹

In Denver, the turning point came in February 1973. "The Johnny Cash Special," a large bus that was driven around the country for purposes of entrapping homosexuals, was offered to various police departments by a former New York City policeman. In collaboration with the Denver police, the "Johnny Cash Special" made two late evening appearances at various stops in the Civic Center area known as a homosexual cruising grounds. Homosexuals were asked to come aboard for sex with the driver. Once a gay climbed into the bus, two vice squad officers popped up from behind a back seat and arrested him. In this fashion, 24 individuals were arrested.³²

"The Johnny Cash Special" episode stung the previously docile and disorganized Denver gays into unified action. The newly formed Gay Coalition demanded a statement from the Chief of Police. At first, Denver Chief Art Dill retorted, "We don't have a bus like that, I wonder where it came from?" But a few days later he admitted the bus had been used and promised that it "will never be used again."³³

Exploiting the generally adverse reaction to this entrapment incident, the Denver Gay Coalition put pressure upon the city to end all harassment of gays. Letters were written, petitions were circulated, and several city council hearings were arranged. As a result, Denver changed the three ordinances used to prosecute homosexuals, and the Police Department reached an accord with the Gay Coalition. Coalition lawyers, the Denver police chief, and a city attorney signed a statement before a Denver district court judge which specified "that homosexuals shall not be singled out for prosecution for conduct which would not constitute an offense if engaged in by members of the opposite sex. . . . That conduct such as kissing, hugging, dancing, holding hands between members of the same sex shall not be deemed the basis for an arrest. . . ." Another agreement was made between the president of the Gay Tavern League and the chief of the Vice Bureau, in which gay bar owners were given leave to police their own establishments.³⁴

Loosening legal restrictions on homosexuals facilitated a public emergence of that community. Like other disfavored minority groups, gays began the process of moving out of protective taverns and underground socializa-

tion. When the Denver gay community held its first "Gay Pride Week" in 1974, the main festival, significantly, was held not in a tavern, but in a public park. The Gay Coalition coordinator announced gay hopes that society would "face up to the diversity of life styles, and stop hating gays."³⁵ At the Cheesman Park "Gay-In," homosexuals were joined by sympathetic straights for volleyball, baseball, picnics, and theater games. *The Gay Coalition Newsletter* reported afterward: "Despite interference by the park police who were concerned about the large 'Gay Pride' sign installed in front of the pavilion, the afternoon was one of fun, comradeship and pride. 'Gay Pride' balloons were given to all and everyone; new friends were made and another step made toward gay liberation in Denver."³⁶

This "liberation" of homosexuals has been evident also in the growing number of other organizations that dispense the goods and services once available only through gay bars or not at all. By the mid-1970's, there were three gay churches, a gay motorcycle club, a gay theater, a gay coffee house, several gay bath houses, gay apartment houses, publications, and other facilities, as well as fourteen bars.³⁷ The yearnings of the Gay Coalition for "places where gays might meet without the tensions of cruising and alcohol" were becoming a reality. The "overly dominant part in city gay life" played by Denver's gay bars was becoming less dominant and the Gay Coalition urged homosexuals to get out of bars and take "advantage of the permissiveness of the city and state's atmosphere."³⁸

By 1976, the emergence of Denver's last, previously "unmentionable minority" was well under way. Social acceptance was symbolized by the cooperation of previously hostile city officials and police in "Gay Pride Week" (although Denver Mayor William McNichols did not serve as parade Grand Marshall as did his counterpart in San Francisco, Mayor George Mosconi).

Reassured by a parade permit from City Hall and police cooperation in stopping traffic, some 500 gays and well-wishers marched from Cheesman Park to the Civic Center. Many participants were costumed festively and "in drag," including the 1976 "Empress of the Rocky Mountains," Billie Cassandra. He paraded in a \$1,000 red, white, and blue turkey feather cape, which draped fifteen feet behind him.

"Denver is coming of age, we're not afraid to march," one participant exulted. "A lot of gays come to Denver because it is liberated," he added, calling the Mile High City the fourth most liberated (after San Francisco, New York and Los Angeles). For perhaps the first time, the Denver Police Department openly concurred. Reporting that no complaints had been received, Sergeant B. J. O'Donnell observed, "I think people are being more liberal. They're accepting other people's life styles."³⁹

THE GAY BAR AS A HAVEN FOR DENVER'S HOMOSEXUAL COMMUNITY

The key institution of the homosexual community has been the gay bar. Scholars of various disciplines investigating different cities have largely concurred on the central role of the gay bar to the homosexual community.

Psychiatrist John H. Gagnon claims that "the gay bar meets all the requirements of an institution that can service the homosexual community."⁴⁰ In her study of San Francisco homosexuals, sociologist Nancy Achilles found that the tavern not only served as the haven for gays but that "it is often the bars themselves that make the most salient plea for the homosexual's civil rights, for it is most often the bars which undertake a defense in cases involving the law."⁴¹

Gay travel writer, John Francis Hunter, contends that

the chief reason for the phenomenon of gay bars is that under the old order, with almost universal pariahdom for homosexuals, anonymity was obligatory and hiding part of the lifestyle. . . . Bars provided the only premises for lighthearted or heavy hearted socializing, not just pick-up points. . . . [They] were the information centers where the ganglia of the gay grapevine intersected. A newly emerging gay learned the patois, became familiar with the opportunities as well as the risks concomitant with being a social renegade, a sexual exception, a freak and a loner. He discovered, often to his utter amazement, that there was a place for him.⁴²

"If he has thought himself unique or has thought of homosexuals as a strange and unusual lot," psychologist Evelyn Hooker writes of the homosexual's first visit to a gay bar,

he may be agreeably astonished to discover large numbers of men who are physically attractive, personable, and 'masculine' in appearance, and his hesitancy in identifying himself as a homosexual may be greatly reduced. As he meets a complete cross-section of occupational and socio-economic levels in the bar, he may become convinced that, far from being a small minority, the 'gay' population is very extensive indeed.⁴³

Hooker calls gay bars the visible tip of the submerged iceberg of the gay community and "the most important community gathering place," functioning as "a market place for the exchange of sexual services and as an induction, training and integration center."⁴⁴

Martin Weinberg and Colin Williams emphasize that the bar is most important in helping the gay to establish his own identity and to learn to relate to the world as a gay. In interviewing several thousand New York, San Francisco, and Amsterdam homosexuals, they found that 30.4% of their respondents said they went to gay bars at least once a week, and 49.2% said they went at least once a month. Only 12.6% said they never patronized gay taverns.⁴⁵ The patronage figures may actually be higher, as the authors reported that bar patrons were the gay reference group least likely to respond to their questionnaires.

The national pattern of a bar-dominated homosexual community holds true in Denver. In a 1974 review of the local gay community, the Denver Gay Coalition's monthly newspaper, *Rhinoceros*, concluded that "the bars play an overly dominant part in city gay life." *Rhinoceros* advocated the establishment of "places where gays might meet without the tensions of cruising and alcohol."⁴⁶ To be sure, the Denver Gay Coalition publishing *Rhinoceros* had held its early meetings, conducted fund-raising, distributed literature, and recruited members in gay bars.⁴⁷ As the only public institution for homosexuals, gay bars have been the command posts for mapping out the emergence of Denver's homosexual community from the gay bar underground.

While awaiting their "liberation," homosexuals have used Denver's gay bars as a haven. As an institution shielding a deviate group from a disapproving larger society, these taverns have been uniquely adapted in their exterior architecture and interior design. Within the urban ecology, gay bars are almost invisible to nonhomosexuals. As a rule they are nondescript, diminutive structures hidden in the inner city, where they are secreted in alleys, buried in basements, tucked into corners, or stored in upstairs rooms separated from the street by dark, steep, inconspicuous stairwells.

Of Denver's fourteen gay bars in 1974, eight were located along Broadway or nearby streets. All eight were within easy walking distance of the Civic Center, the traditional gay cruising grounds augmented in recent years by Cheesman Park. Of the other six 1974 gay bars, all were located in the core city and none in the surrounding suburban counties. Largely invisible by day, these bars come alive at night when the middle and upper classes, who serve as the city's moral guardians, have retired to their bedroom suburbs.

Denver's gay bars generally have had inconspicuous, unadvertised street entrances. A small neon beer sign inside a window may be the most conspicuous clue to their existence. One gay bar consisted of the walled-off back room of a straight bar, accessible only through a dim door off the rear parking lot. A now defunct lesbian bar was most easily discoverable by the large sign of another group which shared an old Platte River bottoms boarding house with the women, the "United Clergy for Higher Education."

These inconspicuous locations and exteriors are designed to discourage heterosexual walk-in patronage. If, perchance, straights do find these taverns, they are further discouraged architecturally by the dark, uninviting foyers common in Denver's gay bars. If persistent straight customers make it through the foyer, they are challenged at the interior bar door by a combination lookout and identification inspector. (As gay bars have been under unusually heavy surveillance from the police, looking for an excuse to close them down, they are unusually meticulous about checking the ages of their customers.) If neither the architectural barriers nor the sentinel at the front door impede a patron, he may receive discouragement when he asks for service. The bartender may do this by either never waiting on the customer or being very slow to do so. If he does wait on the patron, the bartender may express his disapproval by filling the order very slowly and with a warm, flat beer or a weak, watered-down highball.

Such treatment has been a way to discourage curiosity-seekers or offensive straight customers from invading gay bars. Such barroom tactics are perhaps most noticeable in a lesbian bar attempting to discourage heterosexual male patronage or in a male gay bar trying to discourage straight couples. In a male gay bar, women have generally been welcome only if they are lesbian or are well-known as "fag hags" (straight girls preferring nonthreatening gay companionship).

Denver's gay bars have also protected their homosexual patrons and discouraged at-large patronage by not advertising in the conventional media. Rather than advertise in the city's newspapers, on radio, or on television, gay

bars have confined their customer appeals to the city's various gay publications. Some privacy-seeking gay bars even refuse to list themselves in the telephone directory. They are listed, however, in the sundry local, regional, national and international gay bar guides available to the homosexual community.

Unwanted patrons are also discouraged by the alien etiquette, decor, dress, and language found inside the gay bar. Upon walking into a gay bar, a newcomer is generally given hard stares, not just a quick once-over. The object is to determine whether he is straight, gay, or vice squad. If he appears to be gay, scrutinizing bar regulars may attempt to define him as "butch" or "nelly" and further speculate on his economic and social background. Straight walk-ins subjected to such scrutiny frequently leave. If this does not happen, gay regulars may put on an exhibition of kissing or caressing to unnerve straights.

Like the gay bar exterior, the interior decor usually exhibits special adaptations. Denver's homosexual hangouts seem to cherish the use of double entendre in their decor. In one Denver "leather" bar, the most conspicuous wall ornament has been a large logo of a truck company, "Peterbilt." The Cherry Creek Tavern covered up its street window with a large painting of a reclining nude which once adorned a mountain mining camp saloon. In the back room, the wallpaper pattern pictured an orgy of buxom female nudes—a commercially sold wallpaper design sometimes seen in "Playboy-type" or swinging singles bars.

Adaptation of straight forms to homosexual tastes often becomes parody. Denver gay bars have advertised "Go-Go Boys" and "Mr. Colorado" contests. In the latter exhibitions, contestants prance through various "Miss America-type" contests including a swimsuit competition.⁴⁸ Most of the contestants in the annual "Mr. Colorado" contest are sponsored by gay bars. The ultimate gay parody on the straight world's women is the "drag queen," a man impersonating a woman. "Queens," as they are called, mock women and may humiliate men. The "drag queen," as the leading scholar of that species has put it, "symbolizes an open declaration, even celebration, of homosexuality."⁴⁹

Gay bars epitomize the sociological concept of barroom "time out," in which drinkers celebrate a temporary release from the strictures and obligations of society.⁵⁰ In one gay bar, The Door, this has been graphically illustrated by a large wall clock, nonfunctional for years. Someone eventually removed the hands and painted in "Good Vibes Anytime."

Etiquette in the gay bar includes acceptance of anonymity and the use of fictional biographies. Usually only first names are used. The use of nicknames, of the female equivalents for male names (e.g., Teresa for Terry), and of diminutives is common. Biographical information is kept to a minimum or becomes elaborately fictional to protect identities—many gays continue to hide the fact outside of a gay environment. Anonymity is also promoted by the heavy reliance on nonverbal communication—on body language, posture, facial expression, and subtle and prolonged eye contact. Males stand

along a wall or at vantage points where they may see and be seen, scanning faces and bodies until their glance catches and holds another glance. As Evelyn Hooker noted of Los Angeles gays:

Later, as if in an accidental meeting, the two holders-of-a-glance may be seen in brief conversation followed by their leaving together—or the conversation may be omitted. Casually and unobtrusively, they may arrive at the door at the same time and leave. If one were to follow them, one would discover that they were strangers, who have agreed by their exchange of glances to a sexual exchange.⁵¹

As visual "cruising" is a major gay bar activity, there is a heavy emphasis on grooming and dress. Peacock-like, homosexuals take turns strutting around the bar in their finest costumes before their admiring fellow patrons. This preoccupation with physical appearance is reflected in the extensive use of mirrors inside gay bars. Commonly the walls, as well as the back bar, are mirrored to facilitate people-watching.

In dressing for a gay bar evening, men commonly accentuate the crotch, buttocks, and chest. One Denver gay bar has offered free drinks to Monday night customers who arrive with bare chests.⁵² Gays may attempt to enhance their homosexual appeal by wearing a "cock ring" to stimulate and enlarge the genitals. Tightly fitting clothing generally seems to be *de rigueur*.

An elaborate symbolic use of dress has been developed to signal sexual preferences. For example, a bandana in the left hip pocket or keys on the left side of the belt are a signal that the wearer prefers to be "topman" in anal sex. "Bottomman" wears these items on the right side. Men preferring a feminine or "nelly" role may dress effeminately or "in drag," i.e., as a woman. Homosexuals preferring a male sex role may dress in "butch" or "leather" fashion, wearing blue jeans, workshirts, boots, cowboy clothing, leather jackets, or other such "masculine" garments. The cowboy, the construction worker, the motorcycle gang member, and other such "masculine" types seem to be favorite models for the "leather" crowd.⁵³

The "nelly" and "butch" polarization within gay society can also shape a bar's interior decor. Denver's leather bars feature rough, masculine decors of raw wooden plank seating ("meat racks"), sawdust floors, large wooden barrels filled with peanuts, country and western music, and generally dim and rustic interiors, where the pool table is often the center of activity. "Nelly" or drag queen bars, on the other hand, are commonly decorated along more refined lines, often in a Victorian-type style with rugs on the floors, textured walls, fancy fixtures and ornaments, and sophisticated sound and lighting systems.

If the etiquette, dress, and decor are distinctive, so is the talk. Within the gay bar and gay society generally, a new language has emerged to express the distinctiveness, deviation, and alienation of the group. A recently published dictionary, *The Queen's Vernacular: A Gay Lexicon* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1972) defines over 12,000 words of the gay argot. Language, of course, is a major way to shape and reshape reality. It enables homosexuals to build up a private verbal world and launch a verbal counterattack on the straight world.

As an example of gay semantics, the "family" will serve. As "coming out" in gay society often means ostracism from straight society and even one's family, homosexuals may reconstruct a substitute gay family. A tightly knit primary group may include a "mother," defined in *The Queen's Vernacular* as a "homosexual mentor; one who introduces another to homosexual activity." "Mother" is commonly a highly sociable, older man liked and trusted by gays. A "daddy" (cf. "Sugar Daddy") is "an older man who shows affection for his younger male lover with gifts." A "brother" is a "mannish lesbian who is befriended by blatant homosexuals." A "sister" is a "homosexual who is a close confidante to another—he will share anything but his bed with friends." "Aunties" are aging, effeminate, often wealthy and socially powerful males who attract a circle of young men to whom they give advice, sociability, and sometimes, food, drink, and shelter.

A "family" is defined by *The Queen's Vernacular* as a "close-knit group bound together by friendship ties rather than blood-ties and usually living together." The gay argot includes many regional and local usages. In Denver, for example, the circular drive around the state capitol (a prime nighttime cruising grounds) is known to gays as "sodomy circle" or the "fruit loop."

All of these aspects of the barroom—the inconspicuous buildings with their provisions for anonymity and segregation from straight people, the unique system of socialization and sex, and the distinctive decor, dress, and language—help make the gay bar a haven for homosexuals.

FUNCTIONS OF THE GAY BAR

As a haven for the socially ostracized homosexual community, the gay bar has been a multifunctional community center for gay activities. Indeed, many gays lead social lives that depend primarily upon the gay bar. Homosexual taverns also offer a distinctive approach to the basic barroom functions of providing sociability and sexual partners. Although arranging for sexual partnerships is a major bar function, the acts themselves usually transpire in private bedrooms or semiprivate "tearooms" (i.e., certain public restrooms in parks, transportation facilities, libraries, and other public facilities). In his book, *Tearoom Trade*, Laud Humphreys, who did some of his field research in Denver, enumerates the reasons why "tearooms" are preferable to bars and other gay service centers for sex acts. "Tearooms," he claims, "are accessible, easily recognizable by the initiate, and provide little public visibility."⁵⁴ "Tearooms" also provide an excuse for being there, not readily available to bathhouse or gay bar patrons, i.e., ostensibly to urinate. Also, bar pickups "take much more time than the fifteen or twenty minutes of the tearooms. It is easier to fit the latter encounter into a busy man's schedule."⁵⁵

Yet some sex does take place in Denver gay bars. Upstairs, downstairs, or back rooms known as "orgy rooms" or "party rooms" may serve the purpose. Unused ladies' rooms in male gay bars may be converted into "tearooms." Sexual engagements are negotiated through bathroom graffiti. These scribbled want ads often request potential partners to meet the solicitor at a

certain time and date. The following ads were found in the bathrooms of various Denver gay bars, "Big Cock from New York needs slave," "I have 8" who wants it?" "Need lover to share apt." and "Call Terry for cool sex." In the urinals and stalls sexual apparatus is displayed, examined, and sometimes used. One Denver bar has small wall mirrors at crotch level by the urinals to facilitate cruising.

Simple sociability, as well as sexual contacts, are provided by the gay bar. "Since I have been going to the Apartment (about six months)," a lovelorn columnist for a Denver gay publication reported, "I have met over 100 people."⁵⁶ On weekend nights as many as a thousand people pass through the doors of Denver's more popular gay bars. A wide variety of gay bar activities facilitates socialization. Penny brunches, penny pizza nights, ski weekends, nickel spaghetti nights, sing-alongs, organ recitals, drag shows, female impersonators, pool tournaments, and movies have been among the attractions regularly offered by Denver's gay resorts. To promote socialization, the Broadway Cabaret has offered matchbooks with places to list the name and phone number of new acquaintances.

Gay bars become more active during holiday periods because many gays are alienated from their families and few feel comfortable taking their gay friends or lovers home for the traditional family visit. Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Valentine's Day are often celebrated in homosexual taverns with buffet parties and attempts at family-style sociability. The high point of the calendar year for this subculture is Halloween, which is celebrated with drag shows and costume parties. On July 4, 1974, the Triangle spread a free buffet over its pool table and half-price beer for anyone wearing red, white, and blue. Several customers wore the flag while the owner masqueraded as Uncle Sam. The Triangle, a leather bar, also holds a "New Year's Eve Master and Slave Auction." Meetings of various gay groups, even churches, are frequently held in bars. In fact, the first service of Denver's first gay church was held in a gay bar.

Special occasions—birthdays, gay weddings and anniversaries, coming out parties, and other events—are frequently celebrated in a tavern. In 1972, the Other Door sponsored an appreciation banquet "for the Denver Gay Community."⁵⁷ "You are invited to Glen & Walt's 25th Anniversary Party at Our Den," another place advertised.⁵⁸ Festivities are often announced by mimeographed sheets circulated in gay bars, such as the announcement circulated by the Other Door one afternoon in 1975: "The Other Door owners and employees cordially invite you to a champagne party honoring the union of Freddie and Harry, June 18 (tonight), ten to twelve p.m."

Sexual exploits may also trigger barroom celebrations. Partying at Our Den in 1971 was conducted underneath a giant streamer reading, "Happy Sweet 16 Dick & Emmett." The "Coming Out" ritual by which an individual first openly declares himself a homosexual is also a common cause for celebration. In one study of several hundred Los Angeles gays, it was found that "for many persons who become homosexual, gay bars are the first contact with organized gay society and therefore a likely place to come out."⁵⁹

As some Denver gay bars open at 7:00 a.m. and others hold legal liquor-less "after hours" clubs after the 2:00 a.m. closing time, bars are open most of the time. For 19 hours a day during the week and 22 hours a day during the weekend, bars provide escape from the loneliness and alienation that plagues the gay world. One, for instance, advertised itself as "the bar that cares about you . . . after hours Friday and Saturday. . . . Mama's nickel spaghetti every Monday night . . . pool tournament . . . piano bar."⁶⁰

The development of Denver's gay bar subculture owes much to contacts with other cities. Homosexuals generally are, or become, urban people to protect themselves from small town exposure and stigmatization. And because they often lack family ties, homosexuals tend to move more than most Americans, commonly drifting from city to city.

San Francisco's urban input is most noticeable in Denver. Posters advertising San Francisco gay bars are common bar decor. In any given Denver gay bar on any given evening it is not hard to find someone who is just from or soon going to San Francisco. One native Denverite, leaving for "The City," told me, "In San Francisco there is no hassle. I can work, live, and play in a predominantly gay community. There's not the problem of playing it straight on the job, with the family, and old friends. The San Francisco gay community is so large, so pervasive that I can be a full-time gay without having to change roles for a job or socializing." Another young man told me, "Going to the same old bars in Denver where everybody spends their time staring at each other and gossiping is like living in a small town. I'm going to San Francisco. There are hundreds of gay bars there."

Just as Denver attracts many gays fleeing their homes in the rural Midwest and the Rocky Mountain states, so San Francisco attracts many gays who "outgrow" Denver. The gay world is an urban world, with Denver serving as a major stepping stone on a route often leading to bigger cities. One New York gay correspondent found Denver gay bars to be "like a country tavern, right in the middle of the city" and was charmed by the youthful, "radiant," "animated," and "fun-loving" clientele.⁶¹ In its appraisal of the local community, the Denver Gay Coalition's publication, *Rhinoceros*, claimed "Denver is not as clique dominated as some eastern cities. But it is not as openly public as some western cities."⁶²

Visiting correspondents for national gay bar guides have generally agreed that Denver has a relatively open, friendly gay bar community. Yet these same correspondents have had difficulty in keeping their annual guides current. For in any given year, the name, location, owner, or sexual orientation of roughly half of Denver's homosexual taverns has changed. Even more so than straight bars, gay bars are constantly being born, making major changes, and dying. As the University of Chicago sociologist, Nancy Achilles, has written of San Francisco's 200-odd gay bars:

No gay bar lives for long, but the income one produces far exceeds that usually obtained from a 'straight' bar. . . . Due to its inimical relations with the police force, the gay bar has a brief life expectancy. . . . The bars come and go, like a chain of lights blinking on and off on a map of the city, but the system remains constant.

When the bar closes, its patrons shift their activities elsewhere. In the new bar, the same music comes out of the jukebox, the same bartenders mix drinks, the same faces appear, and the conversation repeats the same themes. And often the same policeman is standing at the door.⁶³

This pattern holds true in Denver where certain proprietors have opened up as many as half a dozen different homosexual bars. Certain buildings and certain proprietors became mainstays of the Denver gay crowd. At certain addresses in downtown Denver, homosexuals could expect to find a gay bar although the name and sometimes the proprietor changed frequently. Even though often closed by police raids, these places would commonly reopen with a new name a few months later. At 1540 Welton, for instance, the Club Pelican was replaced by the Back Door (1960-65), the Champagne Doll (1966-67), My Place (1968-72), Hedda's Heckle (1972), 1540 Welton (1973), Red Door (1974), and at this writing the name has changed again.⁶⁴

Sometimes the building or proprietor changes but the name or a part of the name remains. When urban renewal in 1972 demolished the twin gay bars, The Back and Front Door, The Other Door opened across the street. In the new location The Other Door was succeeded by The Door, The Back Door II, and the Back Door III. Within this rapidly changing bar world, probably 100 Denver bars have been predominantly gay at one time or another. This striking instability of their institutional centers has been one indication of the social pressures placed on gays. Ephemeral as they are, these hundred-odd gay bars have served as the haven and activity center for an otherwise and elsewhere unwelcomed subculture.

NOTES

1. An introduction to the literature of homosexuality with contributions by various types of social scientists is John Gagnon and William Simon (eds.), *Sexual Deviance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). Two of the better known novels dealing with the gay world and its bars are John Rechy's *City of Night* (New York: Grove Press, 1963) and Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1948).

2. This point is perhaps best made by Nancy Achilles, "The Development of the Homosexual Bar As an Institution," in Gagnon's and Simon's anthology, *Sexual Deviance*, pp. 228-44.

3. For the pioneering investigation of homosexuality in nineteenth century Colorado, see Terry William Mangan's article scheduled for publication in 1978 in *The Colorado Magazine*.

4. Undated newspaper clipping in the *Sam Howe Scrapbooks*, vol. 1 (1885), of the Denver Police Department, Manuscript Collections, State Historical Society of Colorado, Denver.

5. The frequency of homosexuality among cowboys is discussed in Clifford Westermeier's "Cowboy Sexuality: An Historical No-No?" *Red River Valley Historical Review*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 1975), pp. 93-113.

6. Louis Simonin, *The Rocky Mountain West in 1867* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 62.

7. Dr. George W. Cox, "The Social Evil," *Transactions of the Colorado Medical Society* (Denver: Colorado Medical Society, 1882), p. 78.

8. *Denver Tribune Republican*, Nov. 16, 1885.

9. Interview with Lee Zittle, President of the Colorado Gay Tavern League, Mar. 11, 1975.

10. Donald W. Cory, *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach* (New York: Greenburg, 1951), p. 125.

11. Interview with Terry William Mangan of the Denver Gay Coalition, Mar. 3, 1975.

12. *Denver Post*, May 31, 1949.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*, Feb. 16, 1965.
15. *Rocky Mountain News*, Nov. 11, 1953.
16. *Denver Post*, Feb. 25, 1965.
17. *Ibid.*, Aug. 30, 1974.
18. *Rhinoceros*; *Monthly Magazine of the Denver Gay Coalition*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Jan. 1975), p. 2.
19. City and County of Denver, *Revised Municipal Ordinances* (Denver, 1972), Ordinances 823.5-1, 823.8 and 824.1-2.
20. *Denver Post*, Oct. 24, 1973.
21. *Ibid.*
22. City and County of Denver, *Denver County Court Records*. Docket No. 3-3767, Jan. 2, 1973. (I have deleted the names to protect the individuals involved.)
23. *Ibid.*, Docket No. 3-3001, Jan. 22, 1973.
24. Denver Gay Coalition, *Newsletter #12* (June 1974), p. 3.
25. Letter from Mayor Thomas G. Curran to Donald G. Berezny, Mar. 3, 1965, in Colorado Council of Churches, *Papers*, Western Historical Collections, Norlin Library, University of Colorado, Boulder.
26. City and County of Denver, City Council Hearing on Bill 66, Oct. 3, 1977, Tape transcript; Interview with Terry William Mangan, Hearing Coordinator for the Denver Gay Coalition; *Denver Post*, Oct. 24, 1973.
27. *Rhinoceros*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Dec. 1974), p. 3; *Denver Post*, Jan. 25, 1975.
28. *Denver Post*, May 8, 1974.
29. *Ibid.*, Oct. 11, 1959.
30. Marlin Weinberg and Colin Williams, *Male Homosexuals: Their Problems and Adaptations* (New York: Oxford, 1974), p. 36.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
32. *Denver Post*, Feb. 2, 1973.
33. *Rocky Mountain News*, Feb. 17, 1973.
34. Denver Gay Coalition, *Newsletter #10* (Apr. 1974), p. 3; *Denver Post*, Oct. 4, 1974.
35. *Denver Post*, June 26, 1974.
36. Denver Gay Coalition, *Newsletter #13* (July 1974), p. 4.
37. *Rhinoceros*, vol. 1, no. 6 (Apr. 1975), p. 11.
38. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Nov. 1974), p. 10.
39. *Rocky Mountain News*, June 28, 1976.
40. John Gagnon and William Simon (eds.), *Sexual Deviance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 222.
41. Nancy Achilles, "The Development of the Homosexual Bar As an Institution," p. 235.
42. John F. Hunter, *The Gay Insider*, U.S.A. (New York: Stonehill, 1972), pp. 200-01.
43. Evelyn Hooker, "Male Homosexuals and Their Worlds," in *Sexual Inversion: The Multiple Roots of Homosexuality*, ed. J. Marmor (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 100.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
45. Weinberg and Williams, *Male Homosexuals*, p. 112. These figures may be compared with the much lower bar patronage figures among San Francisco heterosexuals found by Sherri Caven in her *Liquor License* (Chicago: Aldine, 1966).
46. *Rhinoceros*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Nov. 1974), p. 9.
47. Denver Gay Coalition, *Newsletters #1 to #16* (June 1973-Oct. 1974), *passim*.
48. *The New Way*, vol. 2, no. 17 (Oct. 1, 1972); *Rhinoceros*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Jan. 1975), p. 2.
49. Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1972), p. 64.
50. The concept of "time out" is advanced by C. MacAndrew and R. Edgerton in their *Drunken Comportment: A Social Explanation* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).
51. Hooker, "Male Homosexuals and Their Worlds," p. 97.
52. *Rhinoceros*, vol. 1, no. 4 (Feb. 1975), p. 15.
53. Larry Townsend, *The Leatherman's Handbook* (New York: Olympic Press, 1972).
54. Laud Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (Chicago: Aldine, 1970), p. 3.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
56. *The New Way*, vol. 2, no. 20 (Oct. 15, 1972), p. 2.
57. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, no. 17 (Sept. 2, 1973), p. 16.
58. *Ibid.*
59. Barry Dank, "Coming Out in the Gay World," *Psychiatry*, vol. 34 (May 1971), p. 187.
60. *The Catalyst*, vol. 2, no. 10 (Nov. 19-Dec. 3, 1972), pp. 10-11.
61. Hunter, *The Gay Insider*, U.S.A., pp. 288-89.
62. *Rhinoceros*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Nov. 1974), p. 9.
63. Achilles, "The Development of the Homosexual Bar As an Institution," p. 244.
64. Information gathered from the bar and tavern listings in the Denver City Directories and phone books for the years involved.

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Mormon Welfare Programs: Past and Present

Few problems in the United States are more difficult to solve satisfactorily, in terms of either economics or human dignity, than those associated with welfare. Welfare costs are a primary reason for the rising national debt and a leading cause of the perilous financial conditions of several of our major cities and states. Although government provides a large majority of total welfare assistance, the help that comes from private sources is important. The Mormon Church operates what is probably the most comprehensive and successful private welfare program of its size in the United States and perhaps in the world.¹ The church receives no government subsidies for any of its welfare services, and it counsels its members to accept no unearned government assistance. Consequently, the cost of public welfare programs is reduced considerably where the Mormon population density is high. The impact of Mormon welfare is felt more in western America today than in any other part of the world because that is where the majority of Mormons live (Figure 1).

Welfare practices and attitudes contribute to the cultural and visual uniqueness of what Meinig calls the "Mormon Culture Region."² Visual expression is in the form of welfare farms and factories; home vegetable gardens and fruit trees; grain elevators; food processing plants and canneries; bishop's storehouses; Deseret Industries stores; employment offices; social services offices; Indian students living with white families; and the storage of food, clothing, and heating fuel by members. Cultural expression is manifested by an "I am my brother's keeper" mentality that is put into practice. The church is organized so that the welfare needs of every member can be known by people who are responsible for providing help. These same visual and cultural characteristics are found among Mormons outside of western America, but they are not so visible on the landscape elsewhere because of the lower density of Mormon population.

Beginning with the smallest unit and moving to the largest, the L.D.S. Church is divided geographically into wards, stakes, regions, areas, and the church (Figure 2). The boundaries separating these units are precise and membership in a ward is determined by place of residence, not by personal preference. When the church membership is not sufficient to justify wards and stakes, the equivalent geographical units are branches and missions. The organization and administration of the welfare program adheres to these boundaries. The action level for almost all welfare activities is the ward. A ward is presided over by a bishop who is responsible for the welfare needs of each member of his congregation. Wards typically have a membership of several hundred people but rarely exceed 800. Stakes are composed normally