

**Sluts, Ho's and Circuit Boys:
Gay Gossip in a Bar-Going Community in Tucson, Arizona**

Gossip has long been an aspect of both community living and anthropological speculation. Anthropologists have studied this phenomenon in varied locations: in the Spanish countryside (Gilmore 1978), in an African-American ghetto (Hannerz 1967), or between undergraduate men at a North American University (Cameron 1998). Traditionally, gossip has been studied under two overarching rubrics of either people using gossip to control their social milieus in order to communicate relevant knowledge and to demonstrate others as variant from social norms (Gluckman 1963, 1968); or, as a means to gain access to information for individual interests \ (Paine 1967, 1968). Most studies since the seminal works of Gluckman and Paine have fallen into either of the two paradigmatic camps (functionalist versus individualist). These studies have been limited in that they understand gossip as solely a means to building in-group cohesion or as solely a means to gaining information for personal use. The majority gossip studies do not engage both the functionalist and individualist camps. These studies locate themselves squarely in one or the other, leaving little room for a middle way or for exploration of gossip from both perspectives.

One notable exception in the body of gossip literature is Ulf Hannerz conducting work in an African-American ghetto outside of Washington D.C. Hannerz analyzed gossip from both a functionalist and individualist perspective (Hannerz 1967). His understanding of gossip provides the reader with a method in which to analyze gossip as a form of communication, access to information, and creating group norms. Additionally, and perhaps most useful is his claim that gossip provides an individual with a "map of his social environment, including details which are inaccessible to him in his own everyday life" (Hannerz 1967: 57). Hannerz demonstrates gossip as important for both the individual and group by interrogating the dialectic between the individualist and functionalist camps.

Yet another limitation to the study of gossip in addition to the existence of two paradigmatic camps is that this speech phenomenon has also been closely tied to women's communication and less so to men's communication. Jane Pilkington (1998) and Deborah Cameron (1998), point out that men indeed gossip, though they claim men utilize different forms to communicate gossip than women. Essentially, both studies conclude that men are more confrontative than women and use less polite markers in their speech. Additionally, Cameron addresses gender performance and provides a minimal discussion of men's speech about the body. Cameron's discussion is encouraging in a barrage of literature that relegates men's speech to solely sports and sexual conquest and not to the discussion of gender, sexuality and emotional affect.

Though these two studies address men's gossip, they address only heterosexual men's gossip. Subsequently, there appear to be no studies addressing specifically the gossip of homosexual men. Though there are no locatable

studies of homosexual men's gossip there exists a plethora of work on "gay and lesbian language" (see Kulick 2000 for an extensive review of the literature). Kulick himself concludes that the work on gay and lesbian language has had "virtually no impact whatsoever on any branch of sociolinguistics or linguistic anthropology" due to what inevitably Kulick concludes as the lack of a true gay and lesbian language (Ibid., 246). Instead of a focus on a gay and lesbian language, Kulick calls for researchers to look at the manners in which gays and lesbians use language tools, tools existant and usable by everyone, in very specific and unique (possibly queer?) ways. Regardless of whether or not a gay and lesbian language exists, there is certainly a lacuna in the discussion of gay men's use of gossip as a language tool. The only mention of gay gossip encountered was William Hawkeswood's One of the Children: Gay Black Men in Harlem (1996). Hawkeswood provides a mere two pages on gay gossip. However, the author deals with gossip topically, that is what gay black men in Harlem gossip about; not why and how they gossip. Hawkeswood fails to address the consequences of that gossip and merely provides the reader with an account of what he uncritically claims as gossip heard during his fieldwork within the community.

Though previous studies of gossip offer insights into gossip as a social phenomenon, rarely have they addressed the very real consequences of gossip within the social milieus in which it is enacted. Additionally, previous research on gossip has failed to take into account sexuality, desirability and gender. Gossip, according to David Gilmore is a "catch-all term" to "evaluate the meaning of the variability of gossip forms in relation to community social dynamics in general" (Gilmore 1978: 89). In response to Gilmore's call to evaluate gossip by analyzing the linguistic practice from various and nuanced perspectives, this paper is an attempt to understand gossip in relation to a bar-going gay male social environment in Tucson, Arizona. Gossip, in this community, relates directly to the construction of gay-male bodies, economies of desire and to the development, exploration and negotiation of group conventions. This paper explores gossip's effects on the social fields in which it operates as well as gossip's creation and destruction of bodies, desirability, and interactive opportunities within those social fields. If we are to believe Butler (1990, 1993) then bodies are constructed and perceived through language and enmeshed in symbolic domains of gender, sexuality, and desire. Hence, gossip has the ability to create, re-create and destroy the gendered and sexualized body as desirous or hideous and subsequently to create and re-create the social field in which the body resides. It is this mode of gossip, the ability to construct and de/reconstruct bodies and hence desirability and negotiations of group conventions or norms which this article addresses.

Generally, gossip functions as a gate-keeper to social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1977) in networks of gay men in Tucson, Arizona. Desirability, approachability, respectability, and competition are mediated and policed within various social networks in the gay male community through the use of gossip.

There are numerous and intricate ways in which gossip is used to gain information, to create representations, to mediate disputes, to create alliances, and vilify the "other." I will address the theoretical perspectives of economies of desire functioning within this population; then turn to the construction and deconstruction of the desirous body within this social field; address the role of sexual respectability and the location of gay men between both discourses of bourgeois/middle-class/heterosexual and queer/liberated/radical discourses of sexuality.

Methodology

This paper is somewhat new territory for me, as all observations and gossip presented in this paper have to do with myself, the author. I have lived in Tucson for seven years and have been a part of the bar-going scene for the last 2 years. Over the summer of 2002 I began an intensive involvement with the gay scene by working in a gay coffee shop adjacent to the most popular gay bar in Tucson. This job afforded me the chance to befriend many of the bar-going crowd and hear perceptions they had of me and my friendship circle, while also being privy to gossip about others. The coffee shop was a prime location for the exchange of gossip since it was a quieter atmosphere and most of the people frequenting the bar would stop in the shop to see who was there, drink coffee, grab a dessert or just hang out and talk if the bar was not "happening" that night. My position as a barista made me a captive audience. This position was at times frustrating as clients would monopolize my time with continuous prattle. Conversely, the position made me somewhat of a gatekeeper to the gossip and information circulating about others and eventually about myself. I would work an eight-hour shift and then head home to write notes on what I had heard in the coffee shop that evening. Additionally, I would generally go out to the bar every Saturday throughout the summer and would hear gossip there as well, about both myself and others. The bar allowed observation of the effects of gossip as it affected myself and those talked about in the coffee shop. Overall, this paper is a product of a summer of intensive involvement with the Tucson bar-going scene, of conversations involving reported gossip about myself and gossiping about others.

Economies of Desire: The Destruction and Creation of Bodies and Capital

Gay communities have long been taken to task for creating or destroying community based on body fascism, consumption, sexual availability and sexual activity (see Levine 1998; Chasin 2000; Bordo 1998). Gay male communities have also been studied as enclaves of egalitarian democracies of loving brothers all working towards an utopic goal of acceptance and support (Nimmons 2002; Bronski 1998; Browning 1993). In either of the above cases gay communities are analyzed as isolated enclaves of consumption, rampant sex, pumped-up steroid junkies (not to mention junkies in general) and/or they are egalitarian models for undermining heterosexual and restrictive ideals of sexuality, gender and familial formations. Both conceptions of the gay community provide any analytical gaze to interactions between the gay community and the

other communities that define them. Either case exoticizes gay male communities and distances them from realms of coherence, of logicity, of "coevalness" with other communities (Wolf 1982). At times and within certain geographical locations such as gay ghettos in New York, San Diego, and San Francisco, both visions of gay community do indeed seem cogent. Yet, the essential make-up or the non-critical application of theoretical/political underpinnings of these studies serve to increase the exoticization of these communities within the Western European milieu. This exoticization seems somewhat suspect and out of character for cultural critics supposedly writing from a relativist point of view. Seemingly, sexual variance can be studied with a great deal of relativist framework only if that variance exists outside of the Western European location, such as the Sambia (Herdt 1981) or Brazil (Kulick 1998).

Instead of exoticizing gay male communities within the U.S. and Europe, it is perhaps more beneficial to understand the economies of desire that construct and de-construct the worlds of gay men. These economies of desire function throughout any sort of community and can better be understood as a product of human signification than in terms of a rampant libido or associated solely with one sexual identity. In addition, we must look at how discourses of sexuality, gender, the body and respectability are utilized within these communities to create and sustain bodies, desires and economies. Researchers must be aware their representations of gay men (and conversely of heterosexuals) and their communities at times alienate and further distance or exoticizing/eroticizing the Other. At the same time, we must understand how those self same representations of gayness which eroticize/exoticize the Other are used rearticulated by the very communities who are represented. Researchers need to assume that gay men are indeed logical and rational beings and not solely the overzealous consumers, rampant sex addicts, or pumped up steroid junkies; nor are they egalitarian friars, loving brothers in an utopic project. Instead representations, discourses, interactions between the popular imagination of gayness and the lived reality of gayness need to be excavated for how all of the above become clear, useful and employed within these communities and their resultant economies of desire through social interaction.

In order to portray the Tucson bar-going gay community as a cultural arena functioning according to an internal logic and not as some Exotic Other, it will be necessary to describe the economy of desire prevalent in the Tucson bar scene and contextualize that economy in relation to Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital (1977) and Judith Butler's ideas of matter (1993). I do this in hopes of circumventing the notion that gayness is somehow outside of the realm of representation or logic and merely within a realm of sex drives, psychoanalytic deficiencies, pathological consumerism or utopic projects of acceptance and community building. By bringing together Butler's idea of matter as process enmeshed in discursive production and Bourdieu's idea of symbolic capital, I hope to explore how gossip, gossipers, and gossipees function rationally,

logically, and intentionally to control the flow of symbolic capital within this social field.

In the Tucson gay bar-going community bodies are a fount of symbolic capital. That is, bodies help to create not money producing money but allow for sources of capital functioning more discretely within social fields. There is generally no measurement allotted for such symbolic capital other than impressionistic observation. Instead symbolic capital is diffuse and functions in ways that are more easily explainable in terms of discourses producing bodies, qualities of bodies and representations of bodies. Recent studies on men have begun to address the notion of the body and its (re)presentation as beneficial for attaining certain intangibles in our society. For example, Susan Bordo in her work The Male Body (1999) and Lynne Luciano's Looking Good: Male Body Image in Modern America (2001) both conclude that men in the larger culture of the United States in the late 20th and early 21st centuries who are better looking, in-shape, and well-groomed are deemed more successful within our culture. Additionally they conclude that women are no longer the only gender assumed to be concerned with their comportment, attractiveness and bodily presentation. Hence, the "attractive" male, even in mainstream society, maintains an amount of symbolic capital, allowing him more easily to acquire jobs, to acquire sexual partners, to acquire facile social relationships; whereas an "unattractive" male would have to struggle significantly more to achieve the same relationships and opportunities. The body in mainstream American culture is enmeshed in and constructed through discourses of success, attractiveness and desirability; the Tucson gay male bar-going community functions similarly.

The body itself is not intelligible, as desirable or even as a body, outside of the realm of signification and language. The bodies that gain symbolic capital only do so because of their embeddedness within discourses that make the body intelligible as deserving of symbolic capital. Judith Butler's work on discourse and the production of bodies is invaluable to the discussion of power, gender and sexuality in this social milieu. She claims materiality itself, that which is generally understood and perceived by others for the allotment of capital, is a process based on discursive production and never an endpoint:

"...matter not as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter....Such attributions or interpellations contribute to that field of discourse and power that orchestrates, delimits, and sustains that which qualifies as "the human." (Butler 1993: 9-10)

I would argue that the body deemed as attractive is also a process and not a fixed essence. The body is only intelligible through the field of discourse and power that limits and qualifies what is deemed as attractive or those qualities which are deserving of symbolic capital. The body is not intelligible outside of an economy of desire, which is itself reliant upon signification of power and discourse which create and sustain the very boundary and quality of the body in question. Certain modes of being are excluded from a discourse of desire. This

discourse of desire creates bodies as desirous or abject according to signification; and simultaneously destroys the very possibility of other (Other) bodies existing, or at the very least existing as desirous within the space in question. Thus, Butler's formulation of matter and bodies as products of discourse is useful in understanding how bodies are constructed within various social fields. It is the discursive production of matter, bodies and economies of desire within the gay dance that provide comprehension and understanding of a body as a produced body or as a certain kind of desired body and its production within certain kinds of produced space.

In the Tucson gay bar social milieu the body functions similarly in that certain kinds of bodies within certain kinds of spaces allow certain kinds of interactions. As states, certain economies function and produce normative bodies according to temporal-spatial locations. For example, the economy of desire in a leather bar is not the same as an economy of desire in a dance bar and is not the same as a sports bar. Each location specifies possibilities for a hegemonic body, and the resultant system of allotment of symbolic capital. In the bar in question (generally considered a dance-cruise bar) the male bodies attaining the most capital are those that are muscular, smooth (as opposed to hairy), clean-cut, young (21-35) and well-defined. This is evidenced by the amount of attention afforded those living up to this hegemonic ideal, the number and intensity of stares, of hands wandering and attempted social interactions.

Discourses of sexuality, gender, and attractiveness create and sustain, and conversely destroy and undermine, the bodies within this social field. Only through signification does any body exist within the gay male bar going community in Tucson (or any community for that matter) and only through the creation of a body, and its abject qualifier, does the subject gain or lose symbolic capital. Altogether, the body and its creation or destruction within discourses produced within space allots certain amounts of symbolic capital to the subject while also limiting the amount of capital to others. Thus, the economy of desire is many times understood as a limited good economy: one's access to symbolic capital is directly related to someone else's lack of access to the same capital.

Gossip about bodies is prevalent throughout this social milieu. Gay men in this community assess bodies together and evaluate them according to attractiveness. For example, the following interaction was a reported speech incident where some people were outside of the bar gossiping about my body, a friend was wandering between the two groups and reporting what was being said:

N: "Brian you will not believe what they are saying about you out there!"

B: "Who cares?!"

N: "No J. is being nice. He said he thought you were hot and that you had a great body, nice pecs and biceps and all that. But C...yeah he is like all 'Yeah Brian is hot if you like midgets, and as long as you don't look above his neck.'"

B: *laughs*

This gossiping created a body, namely my body, and then placed that body in view for evaluation and eventual destruction. The original creation of my body by J. as "hot, a great body, nice pecs and all that" not only encouraged others' assessment but also allotted a certain amount of symbolic capital. J. created my body as close to the ideal for that social milieu while C. sought to control the amount of symbolic capital allotted and subsequently destroyed the body in question. Thus, symbolic capital was given through the construction of a "hot body" and then taken back or negotiated through its subsequent destruction as "midget" or "not looking above the neck."

Another example of constructing or deconstructing the body to police amounts of symbolic capital took place when a new acquaintance came into the coffee shop while I was working and ordered a drink. While I was making his grande mocha he decided to inform me of a rumour that had been circulating after my break up with a significant other about a year earlier:

R: "You know there was like a lot of talk about you awhile ago..."

B: "Oh really? Why does that not surprise me? How long ago exactly?"

R: "I don't know like a year ago or so....."

B: "So are you going to tell me what they were saying or you just gonna bring it up and leave me hangin'?"

R: "I just don't want it to like piss you off or something..."

B: "It is all good I am not worried and you don't have to say anything..."

R: "No! No! I will.... I mean it was like a year ago or so and you had been with that one guy.... Well after you both broke up he was telling people and his friends that you were HIV positive and that is why you all broke up."

B: "*laughs* Oh I had heard that when I came back from Europe. So no big surprise."

R: "Well ok, I mean I never believed it because you were always nice to me and I knew it was bullshit. I just thought you might want to know that some people might still believe that about you."

B: "Well thanks for letting me know. That was pretty cool of you to tell me."

Again, my body was placed before an audience and evaluated as not deserving of symbolic capital due to supposed HIV status. The attractive body was mediated through a discourse of HIV to create an abject and vilified body undeserving of capital. The ability of a discourse of HIV to create or in this case destroy a body deemed as attractive or worthy of symbolic capital speaks to Butler's notion of matter as processual through language. Boundaries and borders of the body, any body, are never fixed but always and only intelligible through discourse whose evaluation and interpellation simultaneously verifies the granting or debit of symbolic capital from the subject in question.

Altogether, these examples demonstrate an aspect of Paine's understanding of gossip, that is, gossip for individual gain or for information helping the individual within a specific social field. The body given symbolic capital is constructed, reconstructed and sometimes destroyed through gossip (as in the use of the HIV

discourse or the "midget," and "don't look above his neck" example) resulting in the loss of that capital. Thus, the gossiper(s) controls the amount of symbolic capital through creation, re-creation, negotiation and destruction of bodies through the use of gossip. The amount of capital allotted the subject of gossip depends on the gossiper's evaluation and the audience agreement. Capital allotted to the subject of gossip is directly related to the level of desirability. Subsequently if one person is considered more desirable than another an imposed hierarchy occurs with many clamoring for the top. Hence it is in the best interest of all involved to constantly negotiate symbolic capital through the construction, reconstruction and destruction of bodies within the gay Tucson bargaining scene. Altogether, the body is unquestionably a fount of capital, but that body is unstable and shifts according to its existence within language, signification and space. This processual materialism is seized upon by gay men and manipulated through gossip in attempts to mediate and control the possibilities of social and sexual interactions.

Power to Name: Negotiating Symbolic Capital Between Discourses of Respectability

Though a discussion of symbolic capital leads us to a conclusion of individualistic interest in relation to gossip we must address alternative manners by which gossip functions to control capital. I believe gossip to be a performative utterance, one in which the speech act itself performs a certain exercise in naming, creating and sustaining a body and its capital. Butler discusses the role of the performative act as authoritative speech in the following:

Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance are statements that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power. Implicated in a network of authorization and punishment, performatives tend to include legal sentences, baptisms, inaugurations, declarations of ownership, statements which not only perform an action, but confer a binding power on the action performed. If the power of discourse to produce that which it names is linked with the question of performativity ..then the performative is on domain in which power acts as discourse. (Butler 1993: 225)

Butler does not allow for gossip in her conception of the performative act as authoritative speech. However, if we look at gossip in terms of power and authority over and within a social field compared to the examples offered by Butler, we are able to analyze gossip as both a form of authoritative speech and a performative act. Indeed the act of gossiping is one in which the gossiper claims knowledge, power and authority over the subject of gossip (or at least that subject's representation) and over the audience hearing the gossip. Thus, a triad model exists whereby the movement of power and authority is distinctly in the realm of the person or party that names; with an audience needed for validation or repudiation of that naming; and finally, a generally phantasmic presence of the subject of gossip existent solely for manipulation. Butler's examples in the above quotation provide an exact copy of power configuration within a triadic model wherein a person or body names, an audience verifies or repudiates and finally

the phantasmic presence of a person or thing that is the subject of naming. Thus, it is clear that by looking at gossip from a perspective of power and authority, gossip is indeed a performative act resulting from authoritative speech; an act that creates or destroys the body or the subject within discourse.

But whence does this power to name arise? Butler continues to discuss the power and authority of the authoritative act and claims that such authority is a result of citationality, the ability to name from a position of the law or convention which has historical viability:

Hence, the judge who authorizes and installs the situation he names invariably cites the law that he applies, and it is the power of this citation that gives the performative its binding or conferring power. And though it may appear that the binding power of his words is derived from the force of his will or from a prior authority, the opposite is more true: it is through the citation of the law that the figure of the judge's "will" is produced and that the "priority" of textual authority is established. Indeed it is through the invocation of convention that the speech act of the judge derives its binding power; that binding power is to be found neither in the subject of the judge nor in his will, but in the citational legacy by which a contemporary act emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions. (Butler 1993: 225)

In exploring the genesis of power to name, it becomes clear that gossip enforces community norms and standards. This control of in-group solidarity sustains Gluckman's notion of gossip as a functionalist tool for the maintenance of communities. In the process of gossip, the person or party naming or gossiping gains power from the appeal to previous citations of a convention. Those citations are not generally explicit, in the naming; however, the convention cited is clear. Gossip functions in the same manner: the gossiper provides information that in its presentation also presents a convention, or a binding power, naming not only the behavior or quality in question but, its subsequent evaluation according to the hidden though cited convention. Thus, gossip serves to control social behavior through a process of naming, a process of validation or condemnation according to a past "citational legacy." In essence, gossip does indeed function in a Gluckmanian manner of policing social norms and defining the in-group from the Other, while also policing the amount of symbolic capital attached to the body/subject in question.

Gay men in this Tucson bar-going community generally make use of two distinct discourses or conventions in their naming of others' behavior. The first of these discourses can be understood to be one of a radical queer sex discourse allowing for numerous partners with little to no commitment. This discourse has cogency in many of the gay academic, pseudo-academic, and radical political tomes addressing gay communities. For example, Nimmons in his work [Soul Beneath the Skin: The Unheard Hearts and Habits of Gay Men](#) (2002) concludes that sex with numerous partners in varying negotiated situations actually helps to promote and create community. 'Fuck-buddies,' 'jerk-off clubs,' 'open-

relationships' all are viewed as a radical re-appropriation of sexuality for the purposes of building and sustaining a gay community. There is a second, a more bourgeois, middle-class discourse of sexual restraint utilized by these men for the purpose of naming and affecting others in this social field. Many times the term 'slut' or 'ho' or 'circuit boy'¹ comes up when talking about other men in the community. These terms and their usages indicate a citationality of a bourgeois, middle-class discourse of sexual restraint, and indicate that the individual in question does not fall into lines of appropriate behavior. Thus, what follows are examples of gay men using both discourses to establish in-group norms while simultaneously policing the donation and debit of symbolic capital. In these examples subjects are evaluated from both discursive perspectives, forcing gay men into much of the same conundrum of the virgin/whore dichotomy experienced and discussed in feminist literature.

Gay men in this community are understood to go through a 'slut phase' where they sleep with everyone they can. Generally this time is understood to be directly after one 'comes out' to friends or family. The acceptance and discussion of such a phase within the community is evidence of a permissive discourse of sexuality. However, the duration of this 'slut phase' is variable and its beginning and ending are amorphous at best. Therefore the 'slut phase' can be a source of naming and citation (and resultant social control) based in conventions of a more reserved sexuality:

N: Yeah but M. is just finishing up his slut phase and I am not sure I want to go after that!

C: What do you mean finishing up? I heard he has been in a slut phase for the past 4 years and that is hella long/

N: /he has not we were friends in high school/

C: /still who wants used goods like that? You never know what you are going to get with someone in a slut phase like that long.

The speaker N. declares that the subject M. is coming to the end of his slut phase and indicates that he is not sure he is willing to try to date him. C. on the other hand declares that M. has been in a slut phase for over four years, thereby citing a convention of a lesser time period for this 'slut phase.' Finally, C. concludes with an appeal to a discourse of disease associated with promiscuousness (a discourse presented in much of the AIDS prevention literature, for example see Sobo 1995; or Alonso and Koreck 1993). This interaction demonstrates how these two, and really three (the non present subject), negotiate between two competing discourses of sexual respectability. Both a permissive and supposedly liberative discourse are indirectly cited through the naming of behavior, through the performative utterances and evaluations of the subject's sexual behavior which coincide or not to a citational legacy of convention.

The gay-Tucsonan notion of the 'circuit boy' also allows for a demonstration of competing discourses of sexual respectability cited within a performative/authoritative utterance in gossip. The following interaction occurred

as I was working in the coffee shop. A young employee of the bar came in to order some coffee for himself and other bar employees, he began to talk about misconceptions of my identity pre-going on a date and post-dating:

A: Well I was all thinking that you were like some circuit boy - you know out for sex and maybe a good time but that there was nothing else really that you wanted.

B: Oh how nice!

A: Well you have that look and that image you know all buff and stuck up and shit.

B: The buff thing yeah but the stuck up part, well maybe, but that doesn't really make someone a circuit boy does it?

A: Well I heard that you were total circuit boy... didn't ever do relationships and you just liked sex. I think that was why I thought I would ask you out because I didn't want anything more/

B: / great!!!

A: Yeah and anyway I just figured out that you aren't really a circuit boy... you...you... are more like....I don't know....more of like a nice guy....someone that should date and that is not exactly what I wanted.

Within this verbal interchange the term 'circuit boy' is actually negotiated and clarified. However, what is clear is that previous to our interaction A. 'heard that you were total circuit boy....didn't do relationships and you just liked sex.' In that naming at a previous point in time a citation took place that indicated the limits to my identity, that is my body was constructed (through musculature and comportment it seems) as one of easy sexual access with no emotion. In essence, the naming appealed to a discourse which created me as a subject with certain characteristics viable and others abject. This naming allowed certain possibilities or conventions in A.'s mind while disallowing others. Upon interaction that naming became confused with present observation and the 'circuit boy' later became the 'nice guy' worthy of dating. Overall, the citationality present in the authoritative speech act above is one that demonstrates references to two sets of conventions, two competing discourses within this Tucson gay male bar going community. It is between and within these two discourses which all men in this milieu must negotiate in order to interact and socially survive or succeed.

Altogether, looking at gossip from the perspective of power within a performative/authoritative speech act demonstrates the establishment of communal norms. However, those norms are not concretized, rather they are constantly contested and negotiated. Gay men can reference and utilize both radical-gay-liberation-as-permissive-sex as well as a bourgeois, heterosexual sexual restraint discourses for purposes of moving within social hierarchies. The men in this community walk a fine line in naming and performing within and between these discourses as either can become actively cited in order to shame, debit symbolic capital and vilify the other for being a 'slut,' coming out of a 'slut phase,' or existing as a 'circuit boy.' Altogether, the authoritative/performative speech act and its necessary citationality of communal conventions demonstrates that in addition to Paine's gossip as individualistic gains,

Gluckman's notion of gossip creating in-group solidarity and expectations is also prevalent.

Conclusion: Queering Language?

In conclusion, the Tucson gay male bar-going community is indeed an interesting arena in which to look at the affects and consequences of gossip. These men function within and between significations and discourses and present, maintain and destroy images and bodies, through the use of gossip. Their placement within this social milieu demands that these men become experts at negotiating within and between various discourses while also being expert economists in a complex economy of desire. Yet, some would say that this existence within and between, or negotiation of contradictory discourses is innately queer. For example Kulick, discussing a work by Barrett (1995), concludes the following from the work:

This means that queerness is not located in specific identities, or even discrete linguistic codes, as much as it is located in the co-occurrence of linguistically incongruous and socially contradictory forms and registers in the same stretch of discourse.....(Kulick 2000: 266)

The performance of the subject within and between conflicting discourses is read as queer. Barrett associates this queerness directly with bodies and identities (African-American drag queens) also deemed queer, implying that only queer identity produces a queer performance within and between conflicting discourses. I agree with Kulick's critique that identity may not be a useful indicator of a queer language and we must direct our focus from identity to a language of desire. This language of desire would "compel us to shift the ground of inquiry, firmly, decisively, and once and for all, from identity categories to culturally grounded semiotic practices" (Kulick 2000: 273). I believe 'language of desire' would undermine the preeminence of the body as identifier and demonstrate the processual nature of all matter (including the body).

This work has been an effort to demonstrate a 'culturally grounded semiotic practice.' I believe that most anyone, regardless of identity, within this economy of desire and learning the intricacies of the social field could and probably would perform in very similar manners as the men gossiping in this study. The population in question functioned logically within the borders of their social situation. Their creation and destruction of bodies; their naming and authoritative speech acts all indicate unique performances within a language and economy of desire. Looking at signification and desire aids in demonstrating these not as exoticized or eroticized Other, but rather men functioning rationally within a relativistic cultural environment. Overall, I hope this paper is convincing in trying to alleviate some of the "Othering" occurring in linguistic and cultural anthropology's understanding of sexual variance.

¹A circuit boy is generally a man who attends numerous gay themes events throughout the world. These events are imagined to be orgies of music, sex, dancing and drug use. For the most part in the Tucson community 'circuit boy' is

a derogatory marker, one that implicates the subject in all of the above mentioned activities. It is important to note, however, that in other locales 'circuit boy' is merely a name used to talk about an individual in good shape with enough income to attend the parties, nothing more

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