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## Working It Out on the Dance Floor: The Role of Music and Dance Clubs in an Emerging Pansexual Culture

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FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF MUSIC

WORKING IT OUT ON THE DANCE FLOOR:

THE ROLE OF MUSIC AND DANCE CLUBS IN AN EMERGING PANSEXUAL CULTURE

By

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The members of the Committee approve the Thesis of Todd J. Rosendahl defended on March 19, 2009.

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The Graduate School has verified and approved the above named committee members.

*To my late grandmother,  
Wilma Barth,  
for her courage, strength, love,  
and unyielding support.*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	vi
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	
Introduction.....	1
Background and Significance .....	3
Survey of Literature.....	4
Theoretical Approach .....	7
Method.....	8
Ethical Issues.....	9
Chapters Outline.....	10
<b>2. SETTING THE STAGE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE</b>	
Club Atmosphere and Aesthetic: An Ethnographic Thick Description .....	12
The Origin of Metro Night.....	16
A Growing Trend?.....	18
A Symbiotic Relationship.....	19
<b>3. CREATING A NEW SOUNDSCAPE</b>	
The Rules of Set Lists.....	22
Musical Traits on Metro Night.....	23
From 10 until 2: A Musical Evolution .....	27
Musical Analysis.....	28
Club Dance and Issues of Masculinity .....	33
<b>4. ‘WHY THIS CLUB?’: ANSWERING THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION</b>	
Issues of Motivation and Intent.....	37
Complexities of Motivation .....	38
Case Study: A Straight Couple at Metro Night.....	43
Drawing Conclusions of Motivation .....	45
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	48
<b>APPENDIX A</b> .....	50
<b>APPENDIX B</b> .....	51
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	53
<b>BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH</b> .....	56

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the merging of gay and straight dance club subcultures through an analysis of selected nightclubs in the city of Tallahassee, Florida. Fieldwork was conducted in two straight dance clubs that have incorporated specialized nights, known as ‘metro nights’ or ‘house party nights,’ where club promoters aim to bring in lesbian, gay, and bisexual patrons. The motivation for attending these clubs was the focus of the thesis. This study aimed to determine whether sociocultural changes, musical aesthetics, or both were responsible for bringing patrons to dance clubs regardless of their sexual orientations. An analysis of the answers collected from this fieldwork revealed patterns emerging that transcended both gender and sexual orientation. Ultimately, the study revealed that for many individuals, a combination of sociocultural and preferential/experiential factors were relevant, and for most the motivation drawing them to the club centered on issues of comfort and musical aesthetics. With the mixing of dance club subcultures, these club patrons and DJs are creating a new soundscape and social situation for those in the club. I posit that in transforming the traditions and conventions of dance club culture, these individuals are contributing to the creation of a more inclusive, pansexual club culture that allows for a celebration and experience of difference in gender and sexuality that is not always possible, let alone acceptable, in other contexts of mainstream culture.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

This thesis is a study of the merging of gay and straight dance club subcultures through an analysis of selected nightclubs in the city of Tallahassee, Florida. I argue that this merging has represented an epistemological shift of some dance club patrons from exclusion and separation towards inclusion and acceptance over the past four decades with respect to sexual orientation. The motivations driving this shift are the focus of the thesis. This study aimed to determine whether sociocultural changes, musical aesthetics, or both were responsible for bringing patrons to dance clubs regardless of their sexual orientations.

Since the 1970s, there has been a division within dance clubs in the United States based on sexual orientation. Dance clubs have been defined as either “gay” or “straight.” This distinction, while seemingly straightforward, has in actuality been based on a number of different qualities and characteristics relating to the music, events, patrons, and atmosphere of different clubs and different types of venues. I hypothesized that the shift away from this distinction in today’s dance clubs has been brought about mainly as a result of large-scale movements in popular culture and politics, which have yielded a more inclusive, accepting position of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) communities.<sup>1</sup> The impact of these movements is arguably most evident in large cities such as New York, San Francisco, and Chicago, but is also apparent in smaller cities such as Tallahassee, a state capital surrounded by rural communities that is home to two universities and a community college, and that is the location of several “gay,” “straight”, and increasingly “mixed” clubs that collectively cater to a relatively diverse population in terms of the ethnic and socioeconomic demographic of their clientele.

My approach to this study included an examination of how the two identified subcultures, “gay” and “straight,” have begun merging together through a process marked by profound transformations of established musicultural traditions (Bakan, 2007) relating to dance club culture in the United States and beyond. Each subculture is keeping particular cultural traits, while losing others, within a complex process of what might be described as cultural unification.

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<sup>1</sup> Issues of sexual orientation will be the focus of this thesis, not gender identity. Therefore, members of the transgender community, while often included within discussions of sexual orientation, will not be included in this research.



This slow unification may ultimately lead to a syncretism of gay and straight subcultures that have traditionally been defined by social institutions of dance clubs based on divisions in sexual orientation.

Implementing an ethnography-centered theoretical approach in line with ethnomusicologists such as Timothy Rice (1994), Michael Bakan (1999), and Shannon Dudley (2008), I used participant-observation techniques within two Tallahassee clubs, informal conversations with patrons, DJs, and club promoters, and analyses of music lyrics and sound to look at the mixing of members of communities with different sexual orientations. I focused my attention on the motivations of patrons for attending clubs, centering my inquiry on one fundamental question: Why do you frequent this particular club? An analysis of the answers collected from this fieldwork revealed patterns emerging that transcended both gender and sexual orientation. I hypothesized that spanning out from this core question in the research would reveal a pattern wherein patrons were in some instances choosing clubs in response to perceived new possibilities relating to sociocultural changes in their society, but that in other instances their choices had little to do with sociocultural matters, relating instead to matters of musical preference and the desire for certain types of novel, compelling experience. To better understand the responses from patrons, it was necessary to talk with club promoters and DJs to identify the origins of such alternative nights, the economic relationship they have with the clubs, and how the music and dancing are affected by the patrons who attend on these evenings. Ultimately, the study revealed that for many individuals, a combination of sociocultural and preferential/experiential factors were relevant, and for most the motivation drawing them to the club centered on issues of comfort and musical aesthetics. It also revealed that the social and musical changes in club culture were occurring at a slower pace than first anticipated. I posit that in transforming the traditions and conventions of dance club culture, these individuals are contributing to the creation of a more inclusive, pansexual club culture that allows for a celebration and experience of difference in gender and sexuality that is not always possible, let alone acceptable, in other contexts of mainstream culture.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The term ‘pansexual’ is used to describe a person who has the ability to be attracted sexually, emotionally, and spiritually to other people without regard to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or biological sex. In this thesis I use pansexual as a way to describe the inclusion and acceptance of all people from different subcultures within dance clubs.

## Background and Significance

There are currently no studies on this phenomenon in ethnomusicology or other, related disciplines. While studies have been conducted within ethnomusicology and historical musicology on gender, sexuality, and gay and lesbian issues, none have focused on this recent trend of merging dance club subcultures (Brett, Wood, and Thomas, 1994; Gill, 1995; Fuller and Whitesell, 2002; Hubbs, 2004). It is, moreover, the first study to track an epistemological shift in dance club patrons from exclusion towards inclusion of people from different subcultures defined by sexual orientation. The topic also belongs to a larger, interdisciplinary movement within popular culture studies, anthropology, social psychology, gender and sexuality studies, and other fields that involves projects focusing on lesbian gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities and the complex changing dynamics within mainstream culture. This significant change is important to discuss as other related issues are currently being studied by numerous researchers worldwide.

An examination of the background for this study focuses on the social, cultural, and political history of the United States since the 1970s. Beginning with 1970s disco clubs, and moving towards dance clubs found in locations such as New York City and San Francisco in the 1980s, a gay dance club subculture began to emerge that was characterized by a highly sexualized persona. With the devastating AIDS epidemic that soon overtook the gay and lesbian communities during this decade came the vilification and demoralization of people who were identified or perceived as homosexuals. The image shared by people within the public and private sector of LGB communities during this time was that of dangerous, disease-spreading subgroups of citizens that needed to be separated from the rest of society (Ruel and Campbell, 2006).

Through public health campaigns in the early 1990s that focused on educating the country on how HIV/AIDS was spread, and safer sex practices for heterosexuals and homosexuals, the AIDS crisis became less of an issue for mainstream Americans. Along with this came a greater acceptance of gays and lesbians throughout the decade within popular culture through the actions of a number of important pop culture icons. Madonna, Melissa Etheridge, and Ellen DeGeneres, for example, all promoted openness in sexuality and sexual orientation throughout the 1990s, with Etheridge and DeGeneres providing LGB communities with role models for those yet to “come out” to their families, friends, and coworkers.

Along with the strides taken towards acceptance of LGB communities came a backlash from the political and religious conservative right within the United States. Beginning with the reemergence of the conservative movement during the Reagan administration over twenty years ago, numerous anti-gay laws have been signed and protests against civil and legal rights for gay and lesbian individuals by religious communities have taken place across the country. Debates on LGB issues have arguably changed the course of a number of important elections since 2000, and have included states amending their constitutions to ban same-sex marriages and civil unions. During fieldwork for this thesis in fall 2008, Florida's citizens approved a state constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage.

Recently, however, there have been a number of positive changes in political policy and LGB representations in the media. This recent shift can be partially attributed to the opinions of younger generations about LGB issues. Generally more accepting and open than previous generations, this group of young Americans is shaping a new future for the country that puts less of an emphasis on sexual orientation as a defining human characteristic or measure of morality. This change of attitude and acceptance brings us to today, with the slow merging of gay and straight dance club subcultures. The complexity of current attitudes towards LGB communities in the United States is evident within dance clubs, and therefore fieldwork within these establishments provides a useful and important glimpse into both the dynamic world of dance club patrons, and that of mainstream society.

### Survey of Literature

A number of works concerning homosexuality, music, and popular culture have been published over the past two decades. They have appeared in the form of essays, journal articles, dissertations, collections of essays, books, online publications, and websites. The publications closely related to this thesis can be loosely grouped into four categories: gay and lesbian musicology, popular culture and sexuality, popular/dance club music, and the mainstreaming of LGB culture into society. Each category provides a different view of the topic, with authors representing a range of interdisciplinary perspectives.

Gay and lesbian musicology is said to have formally begun with the 1994 publication of *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, a collection of essays concerning homosexuality in the field of musicology, which proved important for the inclusion of this topic

into the fields of historical musicology and ethnomusicology (Brett, Wood, and Thomas, 1994). The essays presented in the collection include research on composers, compositional processes, and popular music in relation to homosexuality. The reflexive writing style of the authors was influential for future writers in the field. Other such collections include *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity*, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity*, and *Queer Noises: Male and Female Homosexuality in Twentieth Century Music* (Fuller and Whitesell, 2002; Hubbs, 2004; Gill, 1995). Each of these examines aspects of gay and lesbian musicology and the effects of homosexuality on historical and popular music.

Along with gay and lesbian musicology, a number of works exploring popular culture and sexuality have also been published. *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*, edited by Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty, examines how gays and lesbians have accepted or rejected elements of mass media within popular culture (1995). The authors examine film, television, fashion, and popular music, showing how LGB communities have taken part in these popular culture mediums. They also discuss the community's criticism of the media and its representation within society. Another collection of essays, *Race, Gender, Media: Considering Diversity Across Audiences, Content, and Producers*, looks not only at sexual orientation but also gender, race, and socioeconomic class in the United States (Lind, 2004). The Internet, television, advertising, and pornography are all examined through these constructs of American culture. Finally, *Cruising the Performative: Interventions into the Representation of Ethnicity, Nationality, and Sexuality (Unnatural Acts)* provides a cross-disciplinary view of popular culture performance in theatre, dance, and music (Case, Brett, and Foster, 1995). The authors examine ideas of identity and its function within areas of performance.

Closely related to publications on popular culture and sexuality are the works specifically written on popular dance/club music. Stephen Amico's article, "'I Want Muscles': House Music, Homosexuality and Masculine Signification," discusses how music, identity, and masculinity merge and react with each other to affect the total gay dance club scene (2001). He examines this particular subculture in the dance club Aurora in New York City, and shows how gay dance club culture is formed. Similarly, Kai Fikentscher's dissertation, "'You Better Work.': Music, Dance, and Marginality in Underground Dance Clubs in New York City,"

examines three groups (African Americans, Latinos, and gay men) who he argues have done the most in shaping subcultures in the city (1996). My thesis will differ from this study because here Fikentscher focuses his attention on the separation of these subgroups based on ethnic and sexual orientation divisions. He does not approach the topic of how these subcultures are merging together (which was perhaps not a salient issue when the dissertation research was conducted). In *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, anthropologist José Limon's article "Representation, Ethnicity, and the Precursory Ethnography: Notes of a Native Anthropologist" focuses on dance as performance of culture (Fox, 1991). This article is a useful reference when discussing and analyzing dance as it embodies the values of dance club cultures. Finally, "Does it Really Matter? Young People and Popular Music," by Christina Williams, focuses on examining what young people feel is important within popular music and culture (2001). She investigates what cultural labels are significant to this generation and how they relate to new musical styles.

The final category of literature explored for this thesis involves the mainstreaming of LGB culture in the United States. A number of books and essays have been published on this topic, particularly in the past ten years. Two books on acceptance of homosexuality within the field of education include *Queering Elementary Education: Advancing the Dialogue about Sexualities and Schooling*, and *Dramatic Changes: Talking about Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity with High School Students through Drama* (Letts and Sears, 1999; Ressler, 2002). Both of these books reveal a greater tolerance and acceptance of people with different sexual orientations, and provide a glimpse into the next generation's views on the topic. Another book, *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities*, is a large collection of essays from scholars in numerous fields of study covering topics of homophobia, media representation, religion, dance music, and hip-hop music (Constantine-Simms, 2001). It covers seventy-five years of history concerning the repression of black lesbians and gay men by the black community and other communities in the United States. The book provides an interesting viewpoint of this community and its struggles in dealing with issues surrounding race, socioeconomic class, and sexual orientation simultaneously.

Other helpful sources include a book written by Jacques Attali, later translated into English by Brian Massumi, titled *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1985). This book focuses on the economics and politics of music and consumption of music in society. His focus

on music as a mirror of society versus music as a prophesy is central to this thesis. On a different topic, Erin Ruel and Richard T. Campbell's article, "Homophobia and HIV/AIDS: Attitude Change in the Face of an Epidemic," discusses the negative reaction towards LGB communities by mainstream America during the 1980s and early 1990s due to the spread of HIV/AIDS (2006).

While the literary sources listed above are valuable and of high quality, there are no sources that look specifically at how dance musics in gay and straight clubs are changing and influencing one another. Given the current fluctuating political and social situation in the United States, research in gay and lesbian musicology and popular culture can quickly become out-of-date and therefore needs constant revision. Using the more historical resources showing trends in these fields over the past two decades listed above, new research can be framed to explore this interesting and important topic.

### Theoretical Approach

The theoretical approaches I used in order to frame my research were focused on musical ethnography. As previously mentioned, ethnomusicologists such as Timothy Rice, Michael Bakan, and Shannon Dudley have all used ethnographic techniques within a framework of participant observation to examine specific musicultural issues. Through ethnographic methodologies, I focused on the social and musical acculturation that is occurring within dance clubs, resulting in a syncretism of gay and straight dance club subcultures. Here I employed a framework that examined processes of tradition and transformation, looking at how each subculture is retaining cultural ideals while losing others as the two groups began merging together in a slow process of cultural unification (Bakan, 2007: xxviii). To strengthen this theoretical angle, I also used an anthropological viewpoint that focuses on new cultural attitudes towards sexual orientations, the voluntary and involuntary motivations that are changing the dynamics within dance clubs, and the struggles for power that are affecting the situation (Creekmur and Doty, 1995; Kulick and Wilson, 1995; Buckland, 2002).

Musical repertoire analysis and dance style analysis also plays a major theoretical role in the research for this thesis. Patrons often attended clubs based on their experiential/preferential attitudes, therefore an examination of music and dance is essential for understanding what characteristics are important for club patrons. Music played by DJs in clubs was analyzed to see

trends in what songs were being played, which artists were being played most often, what both the artists and songs represented to the two subcultures, and the presentation of these songs in their original versions, as remixes with other songs, or as dance remixes. Dance style analysis was also used to better understand what is happening on the dance floor in this process of cultural, musical, and dance syncretism. Music and dance analysis is represented through qualitative descriptions and audio samples. It is through the theoretical lens that cultural values are expressed through the dance and music of a dance club subculture that makes these types of analyses critical in this research.

Finally, theoretical angles from popular culture studies, gender studies, and queer theory are used to formulate the basis for the research on gay subcultures. I am starting at a foundational grounding point that gay and lesbian issues are important to study in all disciplines of academia. The civil rights struggles focused on race and ethnicity of the twentieth century are now focusing on gender construction and sexual orientation. As in queer theory, I approached this study with the viewpoint that this merging of gay and straight cultures within dance clubs is a positive move towards acceptance and inclusion in the broader mainstream culture.

### Method

The methodologies used for this research included participant observation within dance clubs in Tallahassee, Florida. I attended two straight dance clubs during fall 2008, one with a weekly alternative night, the other with a monthly alternative night. These nights were directly aimed at bringing in members of the LGB communities. I conducted interviews with the promoters of each dance club, discussing with them the history of the club, their observations of recent developments within club culture, and their motivations in establishing such events termed as “metro nights” and “house party nights.” I also interviewed two DJs who are mixing at each club<sup>3</sup>, asking them how they structure the music and set lists for each evening, what the music means to them and the crowd, how the music and set lists change based on the crowd, and how the music is changing the social scene of the club. Finally, I interviewed a variety of club patrons, both newcomers and regulars to each establishment, to see what brings them to the club, if they have noticed recent changes in club culture, and how the club has transformed over time.

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<sup>3</sup> Mixing includes the use of turntables, computer software, or both by DJs to create the sounds they desire for the club. DJs often mix different songs, background tracks, and computer-generated percussion beats to create one continuous musical piece that plays throughout the evening.

My application for working with human subjects during fieldwork interviews and research was approved by the IRB of Florida State University on October 8, 2008.

My methodology also included musical analysis, which involved documenting and gathering audio samples of the songs played at each club. Special attention was paid to the artists who recorded the songs, if each song was in its original form or dance remix, the order in which it was played in the set list, and how all of these items compare on different nights. Club music is often altered in a number of different ways. The music in its original form was compared to its remix, with differences in tempo, beat, instrumentation, and style noted. The musical analysis is presented in written text and audio files highlighting various aspects of the sound. Similarly, dance style analysis was also used to show how the music was affecting patrons on the dance floor throughout the evening. Using personal observations and patron interviews, I looked for trends in the mixing of dance styles based on the musical selections heard in the club.

My research methodologies were often aided (although possibly hindered in some respects) by the fact that I am a member of the gay community. Already familiar with many aspects of gay subcultures at the onset of research, my fieldwork was enhanced through my apparent “insider” status in this community. People in the clubs were willing and often excited to speak with me, although whether that had more to do with my sexual orientation, appearance, or their intoxication was not determined. Not as evident to most informants, however, was my “outsider” status within the dance club scene. Dance club subcultures, and more specifically gay dance club subcultures, have intrigued me largely because I am not a member of them. Frequently I was able to use my own contacts within the gay community in Tallahassee as valuable resources throughout my fieldwork in order to meet new people and gain access to them for interviews. Thus my dual insider/outsider status provided unique perspectives and opportunities on this topic of social change and sexual orientation.<sup>4</sup>

### Ethical Concerns

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the challenges and benefits of a dual insider/outsider role in ethnomusicological fieldwork, see Burnim, 1985.



Due to the sensitive nature of the topic of sexual orientation in many sectors of society today, no real names of patrons or others at the clubs, nor any photographs of patrons in the clubs, are included as a part of this thesis. Due to the fact that the state of Florida's antidiscrimination code does not include sexual orientation as a legally protected classification, the documentation of a patron's mere presence in a club on a gay-themed night could come with risks of job discrimination, housing discrimination, and other legal issues. While most of the people interviewed expressed their consent for using their names and photographs within the thesis, the risks for some people involved far surpass the potential benefits of using real identities. For this reason, individuals are identified using pseudonyms, which are clearly identified within the context of the passage.

Another ethical concern when beginning a research project dealing with LGB communities is how to accurately and fairly portray them to the thesis audience. Gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals have often been represented in a negative light in past media accounts, and sometimes only represented in research with regards to the issue of HIV/AIDS. For this reason, I aim to provide a detailed glimpse into the nature of these alternative nights by presenting a number of diverse aspects of the evenings being examined. The highly sexualized nature of these nights noted throughout the thesis is an important aspect of the club's atmosphere and aesthetic, and should not be misconstrued as being unique to the gay community. This atmosphere is pervasive throughout dance clubs regardless of sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, or other classification.

### Chapters Outline

This thesis includes four chapters (the present Introduction plus three additional chapters). Divided into two sections, Chapter 2 begins with an ethnographic thick description detailing my experiences at one dance club event I attended during the course of my fieldwork.<sup>5</sup> The second section of the chapter focuses on the origin and economics of the alternative nights of interest in the study. This portion includes information gained from interviews with club promoters. Chapter 3 provides detailed information about the music played by DJs within each club. This chapter is based on interviews conducted with the club DJs, as well as audio samples

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<sup>5</sup> An adaptation of philosopher Gilbert Ryle's original concept, Clifford Geertz's "thick description" in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) provided an important contribution to anthropology and, in turn, ethnomusicology within the area of fieldwork.

provided by one of the DJs for use in the thesis. The chapter ends with a discussion of dance styles and issues of masculinity observed during fieldwork within the clubs. Finally, Chapter 4 is based on interviews with club patrons, focusing on the sociocultural and preferential/experiential motivations for attending the clubs. Differences in response are compared to look for trends based on the patron's sexual orientation, gender, and other background traits.

## CHAPTER 2

### SETTING THE STAGE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

#### Club Atmosphere and Aesthetic: An Ethnographic Thick Description

Arriving at a dance club at 10:30 p.m., especially on a night set up for the gay community, would seem absurd by most standards. In a club world that considers making an entrance before midnight a *faux pas*, a 10:30 arrival is wholly inappropriate. But in this context I was primarily a researcher, only secondarily a participant, so I chose to arrive early to document how the atmosphere and aesthetic of the club changed throughout the night, and how the fluctuation of patrons into the club as the evening progressed would affect the music and energy level. When I walked in, there were about fifteen people scattered throughout the large club, about half being employees. The music was pounding out of large speakers at the front of the club, where the empty dance floor and performance stage both stood. Even though no one was dancing, the resident DJ was getting the evening started with a mix of popular songs heard on the radio.

The walls of the club entrance were covered with signs advertising the events taking place that evening. This was not any usual Friday metro night for the club. Dressed in a Cat Woman costume, the girl taking money for the cover charge tried to persuade us to purchase an upgraded “V.I.P. Pass” for the evening. We were a little uncertain of what such a pass would get for us (and were worried that we may not want it), so we decided to purchase the regular entrance passes. It was “Superhero Night” at the club, where each person was encouraged to dress up as his or her favorite superhero. While still nearly a month before Halloween, the club had nonetheless been advertising the big event for weeks. Only a few weeks earlier the club had featured a gay military night, where patrons were encouraged to dress as servicemen and women from different branches of the United States military. A few scandalous photos from this night had ended up on the website Facebook, and were used to entice the same large crowd to this costume party.

Just inside the door was a large banner featuring two attractive, shirtless young men standing in a wooded area wearing low-rising khaki shorts. On the bottom of the banner was the sponsor’s name, BrokeStraightBoys.com, a gay pornography website that releases photos and videos featuring self-described heterosexual men engaging in homosexual acts with other men in

order to earn money. On this particular night, men from these videos were going to be at the club with a promise of gift bags that included promotional material, DVDs, and condoms.

A long table was set up next to the door with signs from the “Say No 2” campaign, a Florida group formed to fight the proposed state constitutional amendment that would ban same-sex marriage. Volunteers, including an acquaintance of mine, were setting up the table, which included informational pamphlets, stickers, and petitions to show support for the group. This campaign had been visible throughout Tallahassee on the campus of Florida State University and in other bars and clubs that cater to gay-friendly crowds. It was popular among the gay community and its allies in town, as well as other urban sections of the state.

Finally, the large flat-screen televisions found on both sides of the club, which usually displayed changing psychedelic designs, advertised the evening’s feature recording artist, AMUKA, who was going to be performing later in the evening. The televisions flashed a screen saying the performance was going to be broadcast on G.I.R.L., *Gay Internet Radio Live*.<sup>6</sup> AMUKA is a popular artist with the underground gay dance club scene, and is featured on many set lists for evenings in gay or gay-themed clubs. She is a solo artist from New York who specializes in electronic club music.

My two companions for the evening and I made our way through the sparsely populated club to a booth on the left side of the establishment. The club itself was rectangular in shape, with one bar at the front and one towards the back situated conveniently near the dance floor. The middle portion of the club was void of people, instead being filled with empty tables and chairs spread evenly throughout. Within the assembled tables and chairs were two, small podium stages. The small V.I.P. room was lit up at the front of the club with the door partially opened revealing empty couches and televisions. At the back of the club there was a raised area where the DJ was set up, overlooking the dance floor. Just beyond the dance floor was a small stage for performances by professional artists, such as AMUKA, and drag queens on other nights. On either side of the stage there were hallways that went back to the restrooms.

The men from Broke Straight Boys were easy to pick out at the beginning of the night. Each was dressed in baggy blue jeans and a white tank top. They sported small temporary tattoos that said “BrokeStraightBoys.com” in a red shield on their arms. There were four men from this production company present for the evening’s events. Some people appeared to

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<sup>6</sup> G.I.R.L. can be accessed through the following web address: [www.gayinternetradiolive.com](http://www.gayinternetradiolive.com)

recognize the men from their videos, and were talking with them as we made our way to the booth. Some of the people snickered as they realized who the men were, whispering to friends their doubts of the men's heterosexuality. The four men clearly tried to associate themselves as straight, flirting with women in an almost defiant manner to the questioning eyes of the gay men in the club.

It wasn't until after midnight that a large number of patrons began flooding the club. The vast majority of these people were gay men, many dressed in tight, sexy superhero costumes. There was a pervasive sense of community within this group of club patrons. The majority of people appeared to know each other through previous contacts within this club and others in town. Many were giving one another hugs and kisses on the cheek as greetings when they arrived. They ranged from young college undergraduates to business professionals in their 40s and 50s. Many of the people split off into smaller groups of friends and acquaintances in the seating area. Small groups of people were forming on the dance floor, including the men from Broke Straight Boys who had now lost their shirts and were wearing only baggy jeans that dipped below the waistband of their underwear.

As time progressed, the club continued to get darker, with spotlights, colored lights, and strobe lights flashing on the dance floor and spraying the club with a fantastic array of colors. The sound became louder with each progressing minute, eventually making the walls and chairs vibrate with the pounding bass from the speakers. These two elements combined to create a highly energized, highly sexualized club atmosphere. The light show, combined with the steady thumping beat of the techno dance music, provided an almost hypnotic effect. After midnight, two attractive go-go dancers took to the small stages located within the seating area of the club. The man was wearing small army briefs, and the woman was wearing leather-strapped lingerie and tall, platform boots. The two danced wildly to the music, providing visual entertainment for the patrons as they tried to entice the seated people to the dance floor.

At this point the number of dancers had increased exponentially from earlier in the night. The temperature of the dance floor became warmer with the large number of people and the intense lights shining down on their backs. The increase in drinks being sold also contributed to these changes, with layers of clothing beginning to be removed. People on the dance floor began dancing closer together, sometimes dancing with one or more partners at the same time. Many of these people could be seen grinding their bodies together in a highly sexualized style of dance.

At one point I witnessed something I had never seen before at a club. People began forming what can only be described as grinding lines, where they could dance and rub their bodies against the person in front of them and behind them at the same time. These lines included all combinations of genders and sexualities, although I noticed that the straight men in the lines rarely had anyone grinding behind them. If they did, it appeared that there were women behind them and in front of them.

The sounds pounding out of the speakers were undeniably “gay dance music” to anyone who has ever been to a gay club. The music never stopped, each song transitioning into the next with help of computerized drum rhythms. It consisted of a variety of popular Top 40 hits, including Britney Spears numbers as well as less well-known, even obscure, material. It was music to dance to, and included fast tempos, very loud bass lines, interesting backbeats, and remixes that changed the aesthetic of the songs completely. As the night progressed the music also changed. The later the evening got, the louder, faster, and more unfamiliar the music became. More and more people kept flooding the club, pushing their way towards the increasingly packed dance floor.

As I was on the dance floor, the DJ suddenly changed to calm background tracks. The club atmosphere changed in an instant, making the dancers look around in confusion. AMUKA jumped on the stage and started her set with pre-recorded material flowing from the speakers. The dancing largely subsided at this point as those on the dance floor paid attention to the live performer rather than concentrating on moving their bodies. Not everyone in the club seemed interested in the performance, with some dancers leaving the floor to get drinks as many patrons continued to sit in the middle area and congregate near the two bars. Many times the energy level goes up when there are live performances in clubs and other venues, but on this evening it appeared to work in the opposite way. The energy level dropped as more people stopped dancing to watch the singer. After she was finished the club music began pounding again from the speakers, and the patrons quickly took to the dance floor for the remainder of the night.

With temperatures and alcohol levels continuing to rise, the sexual nature of the club began taking over. People continued to grind with each other on the dance floor, sometimes making out with their multiple dance partners. The Broke Straight Boys were down to their boxer briefs, some dancing with women while others talked to fans near the bars. The entire establishment seemed to be pulsating with the energy from the music, lighting, and dancing.

There was a wild euphoria rampant among the patrons, and even within myself. We were free: free to do what we wanted, with whomever we wanted. There were no limits. There were no rules. It was as if the judgments by society about who we are and what we stand for were checked at the door. At that moment everyone in the club was connected by a single bond. Regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, or gender identity, we were there together as one group.

At 2:00 a.m. the lights came on and the music stopped. The highly energized, highly sexualized atmosphere dissipated instantly. Suddenly the club, still nearly filled with people, seemed large and hollow. People still dripping with sweat and stumbling from a mixture of exhaustion and alcohol began making their way slowly to the front of the club towards the exit. Some people began saying their goodbyes to old and new friends, while others discussed plans for after-hours parties at different houses in town. From here the patrons went back out into reality, and left this unique space and time where they were free from society's judgment.

### The Origin of Metro Night

Metro nights such as the one described above are a relatively recent phenomenon for the college community of Tallahassee. The first metro night was established in June 2007 during Tallahassee PrideFest, a weeklong series of events that includes parties, exhibits, and performances pertaining to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues. One of the promoters for these metro nights, referred to here as Jake, describes himself as an "event planner, promoter, and consultant to gay culture." He was approached by his friend and employer who was purchasing a local dance club. Jake recalled the situation:

He had the opportunity to buy this club, and wanted to make it diverse -- from a marketing standpoint so it could appeal to everybody. So that's why they have a different group in there every night of the week. I was just lucky that I was the only gay person that he knew. (laughs)

The nights of the week Jake refers to include College Night, Latin Night, Ladies Night, and Metro Night. Each night is aimed at a different group of people in Tallahassee, and each night

has its own set of promoters. When asked if the metro night idea was his or the club owners, Jake said it was the owner's:

That was their idea, they wanted me on board from when they first started talking about getting a club, kind of like, "we want to do a gay night and we kinda want you to run it cause we don't know that world."

The name of the night, however, was created by Jake. The choice of "Metro Night" has induced arguments among patrons, both gay and straight. He explains his choice:

It has been kind of controversial, a lot of people are kind of upset that we don't call it a gay night, but...I didn't want to call it a gay night. I didn't want to give it that specific of a label... Calling it a gay night, I didn't want it to be exclusive like that. I wanted it to be more inclusive for anyone that wanted to come. The word(s) "gay night" can scare people away. And it has worked. People don't know what metro night is exactly; they have an idea, but they can come check it out...

The choice of "Metro Night" over "Gay Night" is thus a choice by the promoter to be more inclusive to everyone in the community. The term *metro* has recently become popular within mainstream culture, most notably as part of the term *metrosexual*. A metrosexual (usually referring to a man) is a straight individual that has stereotypically gay attributes.<sup>7</sup> Thus by using the label "Metro Night," there is a synthesis of the two communities together. It is not his goal, or the goal of these nights, to only have members of the LGB communities attend the club. If this were the case, it would seem logical to call the event "Gay Night." The name "Metro Night" provides ambiguity for all members of the community, and can allow for a mixture of gay and straight community members to attend the club without knowing what exactly to expect. It may also provide a cover for those interested in learning more about the gay community without having to tell others they are attending a club's "Gay Night."

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<sup>7</sup> These attributes may include: fashionable, well groomed, good looking, trendy, cultured, sensitive, willing to show emotions in public, confident, and secure in their (hetero)sexuality.



Although the name provided some uncertainty, many of the early advertisements were not so ambiguous. Jake describes how they first advertised when the metro night was in its earliest stages:

In the beginning, the marketing for metro night was very aggressive, and I put it everywhere I possibly could. ...Our first fliers did have a half naked guy on it. But it was for shock value. It was to make sure everybody knew, gay or straight, that there was something going on. And it worked, because everybody was talking about it.

Since this time there has been a lesser need for fliers and advertisements with “shocking” material because the night has become such a success. In fact, while the majority of patrons at these metro nights are gay men, the club’s main advertisement for these weekly events includes a woman with short, windblown hair in a small, black dress. This surprising advertisement, along with the ambiguous name, provides an interesting scenario for patrons attending the club who may not know what to expect.

#### A Growing Trend?

After the success of the first metro night in Tallahassee, other clubs also began incorporating similar events into their weekly or monthly night specials. One other primarily straight club in which I conducted fieldwork has a monthly (rather than weekly) night aimed at bringing in members of the LGB communities. This night occurs on the first Saturday of each month, and is called the “Saturday Night House Party.” Although organized by the same promoter, this event has a different club owner and DJ than the first club, and represents a new group of people that may mix with regular patrons on that specific night. Also, it is located in a different part of town, much closer to other bars and clubs that could provide an opportunity for people walking past the establishment to stop in to see what is happening. One more example in Tallahassee of a metro night in a straight club occurs on Wednesday evenings. While it started in one club during summer 2008, it moved in August to another club in town on the same night of the week. This club is much smaller than the other locations in town, and provides a more intimate atmosphere.

According to discussions he has had with his brother in West Palm Beach, Florida, Jake explained how the occurrence of metro or alternative nights in straight clubs is popular in larger cities:

Well, it's actually a growing trend, for larger clubs in larger cities to have an alternative night... It has become more socially acceptable which has enabled these owners to allow these nights. The bottom line is they want to make money. That's the biggest driving force. It's a market. It's a big market. And they know that.

Here Jake describes how social change and economics are working together to create a situation where metro/alternative nights thrive in small and large cities. This description counters an initial hypothesis about the occurrence of these nights primarily in smaller cities. Smaller cities have a smaller LGB population, thus making it more difficult for gay and lesbian bars to succeed. It may, instead, be easier to support one or more nights per week at straight clubs that already have a strong following by regular patrons. The accounts of Jake and others confirm that this is not only happening in small cities, but also in numerous large cities throughout the United States.

#### A Symbiotic Relationship

The promoters for the variety of metro/alternative nights at dance clubs in Tallahassee described their connection to these clubs as a symbiotic relationship. In the eyes of the promoters, the club owners are naturally focusing on the economics of the situation. The promoters, however, are not focusing their efforts on the economic benefits of the relationship between the LGB communities and the dance clubs. Their focus is on creating an opportunity for visibility of the communities within Tallahassee, as well as providing a safe, friendly location for the members of these communities to coalesce on a regular basis. Their hypothesis is that by creating opportunities for visibility of the LGB communities by mainstream culture in Tallahassee, the relationship between these two groups of people will improve over time. Jake states:

The exposure is, I think, the key element... Week, after week, after week, after week, people are hearing the radio ads and they are seeing that this is a part of mainstream culture and we're just, we're just not going to go away.

Here this promoter shows his view that repetition of exposure, no matter the nature of the exposure, will be beneficial to the larger social movement of visibility and acceptance of LGB community members and culture.

This exposure does not necessarily have to be in the form of straight people going to the clubs each week to see the LGB communities. As the quote above shows, Jake believes the radio ads also aid as a reminder to mainstream culture that there is a gay community in the relatively small city of Tallahassee, even if it may not always be visible to everyone at all times. Another promoter, referred to as Michael, agrees with this sentiment:

Right, we're not weird. We're not freaks. No really, we're just, you know, other people. I think that message is starting to get across to mainstream culture, finally.

While the process may be slow and hard to track, these two promoters believe this exposure is one way to help change mainstream society's reluctance to accept the LGB communities in Tallahassee and in other locations of the United States.

The promoters describe the other half of the mutual relationship between club owners and the LGB communities as one based on economics. The promoters used this fact to help establish a thriving relationship between the clubs and the LGB communities through metro/alternative nights. One of the promoters brought up the fact that many members of the LGB communities in Tallahassee are wealthy, and by tapping into this resource once a week, or once a month, the club owners could make a sizeable profit. Michael stated:

I think that's what helped us, because with the (gay) people that have the money, there is a huge market, and they (club owners) want to tap into that.

Both promoters also commented on the fact that the metro/alternative nights were successful because of the large amount of alcohol purchased on these nights by the patrons. The

combination of the established wealth of many of the patrons, and the spending habits of this group, creates a situation where club owners can make more money than on other nights.

Jake acknowledges the club owners are not necessarily interested in their reason for being a part of this relationship, nor are they necessarily interested in the club owners' reason. He states:

By feeding their need for a healthy bottom line, it's indirectly, I mean, they are indirectly helping us. They are not out to help the gay community. That's not their goal.

While this may not be their goal, or may only be one of their many goals, the relationship works in such a way that both parties benefit in a manner that creates reason to continue to support each other.

## CHAPTER 3

### CREATING A NEW SOUNDSCAPE

#### The Rules of Set Lists

The existence of a genre titled “gay music” has been discussed by musicologists and journalists in the past, and was brought up by club promoters, patrons, and DJs during interviews. In the article titled “Lesbian and Gay Music” printed first in the newsletter of the Gay and Lesbian Study Group (GLSG) of the American Musicological Society, and later edited and printed in the *New Grove II*, Philip Brett and Elizabeth Wood discuss the concept of “gay music” and its historical and modern understanding (Brett and Wood, 2002). Detailing at length the historical context in which homosexuality and music have converged, these two important scholars in the area of sexuality studies within musicology attempt the difficult task of describing “gay music.” They begin by pointing to the idea of the diva effect. Among gay men, this effect tends to “produce a devotion to sopranos,” with singers such as Mae West, Judy Garland, Liza Minelli, Bette Midler, Barbra Streisand, and Madonna listed within this category in popular music (Brett and Wood, 23). Their music often contains a mixture of vulnerability/struggle, defiance, and humor, three elements in which the gay community can often relate. Within the lesbian community, Brett and Wood describe their classical and popular musical affinities with sopranos, mezzo-sopranos, and contraltos, especially those who cross dress (Ibid, 23).

In interviews conducted throughout fieldwork, the ideas expressed above by Brett and Wood were confirmed by nearly every person associated with dance clubs. During interviews with the two DJs, (labeled here as DJ-A and DJ-B), the men discussed at length the differences between music for gay men, lesbians, and straight patrons. Gay music was often described as uplifting, including female vocals and divas within the musical world. Lesbian music was often associated with hip hop and other darker sounds within music. DJ-B described the difference in his opinion of the two music types:

Where gay guys would be more into dancy music, female vocalists, techno-sounding pop kinda stuff, lesbian women are more interested in current hip hop and that sort of style of music.

He went on to further describe how he approaches set lists for crowds that include a majority of straight people, and compares them to his gay audiences:

When it comes to a mainstream, frat boy sorority, you know (the) 18 to 25 crowd, the standards are going to be pretty much Top 100 hip hop and pop, you know, Top 40 kind of stuff... When you get into weddings, of course, and private parties, it's going to (be) like specific requests they want to hear, and that varies from customer to customer. But when it comes to a gay crowd, I feel like they are more accepting of new stuff, and at the same time I feel like the general average age of the crowd is a little bit older than you'd get with the normal college bar scene. While they are more accepting of new stuff, and they love the current stuff, they are also, you know, all about what happened ten to twenty years ago. So, it's, I hate to say it, but it's kind of open season when it comes to a gay crowd, they are pretty accepting of everything.

DJ-A expressed similar trends he observed when catering to crowds with larger numbers of straight people:

I found that straight crowds usually like a lot of hip hop. You know, hip hop or live rock bands, which there are a lot of in Tallahassee, or just popular Top 40 kind of stuff. Usually straight girls like to hear stuff like Britney Sears and stuff they hear on the radio and recognize.

Based on their statements, it appears that music preferred by lesbian patrons is more similar to that of straight patrons. There is more of an emphasis on hip hop and less on the high female vocals of gay male dance music. Both DJs also discussed the gay and lesbian community's acceptance of underground musicians not in the mainstream charts. These members of society are not always accepted by mainstream culture, and it is plausible that they may feel an affiliation with the singers and bands that are also marginalized by the musical world.

#### Musical Traits on Metro Night

Given the variety of statements given while discussing the commonalities and differences of musical preference based on sexual orientation in the section above, creating a set list for a crowd of mixed orientations would seem to be a challenge for any DJ in the dance club scene. On alternative nights in straight clubs, such as metro nights, these two DJs have first hand experience with creating a new soundscape for the dance club. Both DJs discussed the technique of adjusting the music based on the diversity of the crowd on any particular night. For example, if the majority of the patrons were of one particular sexual orientation, they would play more music that these patrons would enjoy on the dance floor. DJ-B's response to the question showed how mathematical the scenario can become:

Anywhere you go, it's going to be certain percentages. If you go to a straight night, there is going to be a certain contingency of gay people. If you go to a gay night, there is going to be a certain contingency of gay people. And it's all about figuring out how many there are, what they want to dance to. Like I said, it's one of those play it by ear and feel it out (situations).

Using this approach, the soundscape of any night within the same club could be different from other nights depending on the patrons present. Also, the soundscape can shift throughout the evening based on who arrives over the course of the night. For example, on one night during fieldwork there was a private party ending at 10 p.m. that catered almost exclusively to lesbian and bisexual women, scheduled just before a weekly metro night. After the party was over, many of the women stayed in the club and continued to dance. During this time the music was aimed at keeping this group of patrons on the dance floor, so more hip hop and Top 40 hits were played by the DJ. Between that time and the end of the night, a large influx of gay men invaded the club, altering the balance of genders and sexual orientations to favor this group. DJ-A slowly shifted the music to fit this group of people. While this phenomenon can happen at any club based on a number of factors, it appears that this shift is most clearly evident in clubs that cater to the gay and lesbian communities because of the likelihood of the two groups both attending, and the contrasts between the favored musics of each group.

The mixture of gay men and lesbians in Tallahassee was brought up by both DJs, indicating that this may be a unique feature of this smaller city. While larger cities can sustain

clubs and nights that cater to each group separately, Tallahassee is small enough that the two groups are more likely to be brought together within clubs, and not further divided based on gender rather than sexual orientation. DJ-A had prior working experiences in other areas of Florida, and compared Tallahassee to these locations:

I've found that in Tallahassee they do like a lot more Top 40 kind of stuff than they do in Gainesville or in Panama City. Britney Spears always packs the dance floor for some reason. I can't figure it out. Madonna, Cher, yeah... stuff like that usually gets people on the dance floor. It's the challenge to keep them there. If I play stuff that I like that is... a little less known and is geared more at the gay crowd than a regular anybody crowd... (then I ) just have to go back and forth and see how people react to it.

I pressed him further to compare music not only within Florida, but in other areas of the country:

The music is about the same. On G.I.R.L. (Gay International Radio Live) there are DJs from New York, L.A., Vegas, (places) like that. You get a good mixture, a good idea of how music is different. But, you know, it's not really that much. I guess the bigger the city, the bigger the club, the more kind of obscure you can get with the music. There's still a local house kind of sound, but they deviate from that a little bit more. They are playing a little bit more independent stuff. Some of the bigger DJs, they produce some of their own music as well, and some of their own remixes as well. In a situation like that, people are there to dance, so you can be a little more free with the music that you play and play some more obscure stuff and try to expose the audience to more independent music and obscure stuff, as long as it (has) got the same type of mood and energy and so forth that you are going after.

DJ-B had lived in Miami, and discussed his observations with me (TR) at clubs in this southern Florida city. The following is a short excerpt of the interview:

*TR:* In Miami how was the clubbing scene different than in Tallahassee?



*DJ-B:* Even in a straight club on a straight night, it would be about a 30 (percent gay) to 70 (percent straight) mix. And the same way on a gay night: there would be about 30 percent straight people just because it was a badass party and people wanted to come out and have a good time. While it has its certain effects on the crowd at the party and type of music they play, the lines are very much blurred between straight night and gay night.

*TR:* Were clubs having gay and straight nights (before 2000)?

*DJ-B:* Absolutely. You would find straight clubs that would have gay night(s) and gay clubs that would have straight nights. You would find clubs that wouldn't have any certain affiliation that would have 50/50. The best example of that would be foam parties... You would have a foam party at a gay or straight club and you would have a 50/50 mix... It was more of a get nasty, get freaky, kind of sex party than it was anything else. And again when you come into that the lines are blurred, people are throwing their inhibitions out the window and doing whatever they want. In South Beach it was so accepted that nobody really made a big deal about it. If you were a straight guy going to a gay club it wasn't automatically assumed that you were gay, or you were looking, or you were in the closet, or whatever. You were having a good time.

As can be seen in this conversation, the idea of alternative or metro nights is not new, nor is it unique to Tallahassee. As was stated by the club promoters earlier and these two DJs, this clubbing phenomenon has been occurring for many years and is driven primarily by money. If there is an opportunity to make money by catering to a particular audience, it will often be taken advantage of by those willing to take the risk. DJ-B closed the conversation by stating the following:

It's really all about money. It's a business... Whether your target audience is gay people or straight people, you are in the business of making people happy all the time, which is really hard to do. But at the same time, that is the goal you strive for. You want to be able to let everyone have a good time, whether they are into guys, or into girls, or into

whatever. You don't ask those kinds of questions. You just play music, serve drinks, and pretty much the rest falls into place.

### From 10 until 2: A Musical Evolution

Regardless of who is in the club, the musical evolution that occurs each night is remarkable to anyone looking specifically at the music. I use the term evolution here not in a way that implies that the music is evolving into something better as the night passes. Rather the idea of evolution of the music refers to the order in which the DJs choose to play the music that slowly changes the overall atmosphere of the club, both in terms of its sonic and visual elements. The DJs literally change the aesthetic of the club in a manner similar to slowly turning up the volume on a round dial of a stereo. As was evident in the ethnographic thick description in Chapter 2, every part of the club experience becomes enhanced through this change, ratcheting up the volume, intensity, lighting, heat, and sexual energy with each notch of the dial.

DJ-A described his approach to each metro night using the time of the night as his basis for alterations in music, along with the natural changing in patrons based on his generalized observations during months of performing.

You have to think about the energy level of the music... At 10:00 it is just getting done with happy hour and there's not much of a crowd. They play a wide variety of oldies and 80s music for happy hour. So at 10:00 I try to play stuff that is slower and not as much energy. Then (I) just build into stuff that's more energetic but is also more vocal I guess. Then about midnight is when the peak crowd gets there. That's when I try to start out with a lot of stuff that is more recognizable, the Top 40 stuff that's on the radio just to get people dancing. And then I guess towards the end of the night think more in terms of stuff that's just unique to the gay culture...female artists (that) are not really popular in the mainstream Top 40 genre, but they are really popular in the gay community.

Here he describes the evolution of the music throughout the night using the energy level of the club as an indicator of how he should proceed. The DJ uses techniques to get patrons on the dance floor by playing recognizable songs first, then introducing more obscure material once the

people are out on the floor. These statements were confirmed by my observations over the course of the metro nights I attended during fieldwork.

DJ-B stated similar approaches to the evening's set lists, but also added a cyclical routine to the performance based on energy levels within the music and club.

Generally, regardless of who the crowd is, I start off with stuff that people can hang out and drink and talk to. And then slowly I work my way up to the high energy, everyone get on the dance floor kind of stuff... I start off slow and get to a certain climax, and then we'll go back to slow and get to another climax. The reasoning behind that is that you want to have a balance of people dancing on the floor and people going to the bar to buy drinks. That's a huge part of the business and a huge part of my longevity as a DJ: being able to make the bar money... At the end of the night, that's the bottom line. I can have 200 kids in there dancing their asses off, but if they don't buy any drinks they aren't going to ask me back next week.

The idea of a cycle does not mean that you go back to the beginning after every cycle is complete. The overall energy level of the club is still slowly going up, even if a song is thrown into the mix that is slightly less energized than the previous song. Again the conversation takes a turn towards economics, both for the club promoters and for the DJs. As was discussed in the previous chapter, club promoters are aware of the need for financial success for the club owners in order for these nights to continue, so they select their DJs based on who will use techniques such as this cycle of dancing and drinking to keep the nights going in the future.

### Musical Analysis

Here we turn to an analytical consideration of music played at metro nights, house parties, and similar kinds of dance club events. As is already evident from the foregoing discussion, there is considerable musical diversity between and even within given club events, but there are some unifying themes that make analysis a productive lens through which to view the dance-club music as a sonic and cultural phenomenon. Rather than try to be comprehensive, I will instead focus my analysis on a single segment of a music mix recorded by DJ-A. This particular mix contains many, if not most, of the core elements of dance music style and

repertoire played in these clubs, and therefore provides a useful case study point of reference for specific and larger considerations of musical style, form, and aesthetics. DJ-A provided permission for me to use a podcast of this selection, which is available at <http://dynamiccanvas.com/GIRL-9-05-08.mp3>. It was originally recorded live at the dance club on metro night on September 5, 2008. The total podcast is over two hours long: this analysis covers approximately the first twenty minutes. This portion consists of three remixed songs with underlying synthesized percussion beats. As will become evident in the following paragraphs, these songs are representative of a mixed crowd at the club in regards to gender and sexual orientation. See Table 1 for a summary of the musical details discussed in these paragraphs.

The audio example begins with a steady dance beat performed by computerized percussion sounds. Slowly the beats become layered with other contrasting beats and various electronic sounds. It is not until 1:30 into the selection that a distinct sound begins to emerge from the mix. At this point a rock/metal sound begins to form, with the use of looped electric guitar riffs that sound very different from typical gay clubbing music. The lyrics begin at 2:41, where portions of a remake of the song “For What It’s Worth (Something’s Happening Here)” by Buffalo Springfield begins to take control of the mix. This piece fits the trends discussed by both DJs earlier in the chapter by playing a recognizable piece early in the night, as well as it being a song that may be accessible to a diverse audience. Incorporated into the lyrics and beats are sound clips from various American television news sources that are discussing headlines dealing with terrorist attacks and threat warnings to the United States. The remix juxtaposes the polarization and violence of the world today with that of the late 1960s when the song was originally released. While the song originally dealt with protests of the Vietnam War, connections can be drawn between that time and the violence and protests of the current wars being fought by the United States military.

Just after 7:00 there is a return to the basic 4/4 electronic beat. This sets the stage for a fast change to the next musical selection that provides a stark contrast to the first piece. The new tune that begins to be layered into the mix is “Bossy” by Lindsay Lohan. This piece features a female voice (Lohan’s) singing lyrics that portray a strong woman who takes charge of the relationships in her life. She demands things when she wants them, and will “go fast” in the early stages of the relationship because she is a busy woman and has other things to do. The

electronic sounds continue to fill the audio track, with percussion beats, electronic instruments, and crescendos enhanced by either suspended cymbal-like sounds or beats that begin slow and double in speed, creating suspense that leads into the next section. Lindsay Lohan, while known primarily as an actress, has also released solo albums. She may appeal to the LGB communities partially because of her same-sex relationship with girlfriend DJ Samantha Ronson. A musician's openness about same-sex encounters or relationships within the mainstream media often garners respect from the LGB communities. This can be seen with other music artists such as k. d. Lang and Melissa Etheridge, both of whom are very popular in certain sections of the LGB communities.

At 13:33, DJ-A hints at the transition to a new song with a portion of a verse from another popular song. The words "I Liked It" are thrown in at the end of Lohan's song, easily identifiable as a portion of Katy Perry's well-known song "I Kissed a Girl." This song is popular among the gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities, discussing a straight girl's experience with kissing another girl and enjoying it. The lyrics of the chorus are as follows:

*I kissed a girl, and I liked it  
The taste of her cherry chap stick  
I kissed a girl just to try it  
I hope my boyfriend don't mind it*

The high feminine voice, electronic sounds, and subject matter all make this song easily identifiable as gay dance club music. In its original form, however, it is a song that is very popular across the spectrum of sexual orientations. This fact coincides with the views of both DJs of putting recognizable songs early in their sets to get people on the dance floor, after which they can incorporate more obscure material. It also works early in the set because it does appeal to a wider mix of sexual orientations, which are more often present earlier in the evening. As was the case in my evening detailed in Chapter 2 and in the accounts of the DJs earlier in this chapter, the mixture of the three songs included a constant, steady dance beat that never stops. The songs are adjusted by the DJ to fit the tempo of the previous song in the set list using his sound equipment. While the aesthetic changes based on the singer and song played, the overall dance beat never stops.

**Table 1:** A musical analysis of the metro night podcast.

<i>Guided Listening Summary</i> <sup>8</sup>
0:00-0:58
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Layering of different electronic background beats/sounds approximately every 15 seconds, gradually building in intensity</li></ul>
0:59-1:56
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Looped vocals repeated (“Got to beware”) over established percussion beats</li><li>• Introduction of electric guitar melody</li></ul>
1:57-2:40
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Well established instrumental introduction leading to the first song</li></ul>
2:41-3:46
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Start of “For What It’s Worth (Something’s Happening Here)”</li><li>• First verse followed by chorus (with variations, repetitions, and reverberations)</li></ul>
3:47-3:59
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Television and radio quotes dealing with terrorism played over percussion sounds</li></ul>
4:00-5:12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Second verse and chorus</li><li>• Instrumental interlude with electric guitar</li></ul>
5:13-5:27
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Television and radio quotes dealing with terrorism played over percussion sounds</li></ul>
5:28-7:36
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Third verse and chorus</li><li>• Breakdown of chorus with variations and repetitions</li><li>• Last chorus</li><li>• Instrumental transition into the second song</li></ul>
7:37-9:06
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Start of “Bossy” with introduction of new looped lyrics (“I’m Just a Little Bossy”), change of background beats, and addition of electric keyboard</li><li>• Layering of instrumental parts and lyrics, creating a slow crescendo of intensity</li></ul>
9:07-11:32

<sup>8</sup> Modeled after “Guided Listening Quick Summaries” found in Bakan, 2007.

- First verse and chorus (with variations, repetitions, and reverberations)
- Variations of verse/chorus mix

11:33-13:32

- Second verse and chorus
- Variations of verse/chorus mix

13:33-14:00

- Introduction of new looped lyrics (“I Liked It”) over the end of “Bossy”
- Transition to third song of the mix

14:01-15:28

- Start of “I Kissed a Girl” with new looped lyrics (“I Liked It”), change of background beats and sounds (slightly darker than previous piece)
- Verse lyrics looped quietly underneath percussion beats building up to first verse (“My head gets so confused,” “This was my...”)

15:29-17:09

- First verse and chorus

17:10-19:19

- Second verse and chorus
- Transition back into another chorus

19:20-20:16

- Final chorus
- Instrumental transition into the next song of the mix

Based on the observations made about the first twenty minutes of the audio sample, I would hypothesize that DJ-A had a very mixed crowd during this first portion of the night, when this mix would have been played. (Given my experiences in the club, this is right on target for who the patrons are at this time of the evening.) The darker sound of the first piece, as well as the subject matter of the other two, lend the music to a more lesbian and bisexual crowd when compared to the end of the audio file. At this later point it is more focused on the uplifting

female vocals, electronic sounds, and other effects favored by the gay male dance club patrons. This suggests a change of clientele over the course of the night from mixed/lesbian majority to a gay male majority by the end of the evening, similar to my experience detailed in Chapter 2. Overall, there is a slow evolution of the intensity and range of the vocalists played across the two hours.

### Club Dance and Issues of Masculinity

The highly sexualized persona of the club is acted out on the dance floor each night as patrons dance in couples or in groups with their partners, friends or strangers. While the crowd is different each night based on the club and the patrons in attendance, there appears to be an unspoken yet understood schedule for dancing. Dancing in each club does not begin in force until late in the evening when the club begins to fill with patrons. While there may be a small number of people on the dance floor between 9 p.m. and 12 a.m., large numbers of dancers do not make it to the floor until nearly 12:30 a.m. This change of atmosphere corresponds to the change in energy and intensity of the music, as discussed in the first section of this chapter. It is at this time when the dancing becomes an intricate part of the club's aesthetic.

Dancers are not always paired based on gender or sexual orientation. In fact, these pairings are quite different than one may expect. The mixing of gay and straight dance club subcultures is directly evident in this aspect of the evening's events. Gay dance clubs are often split into clubs that cater to gay men, and others that cater to lesbians. Often there are also clubs that cater to both, but have specific nights aimed at bringing in one of the two communities. In these instances, gay men are more likely to dance with other gay men, and lesbians are more likely to dance with other lesbians largely due to the composition of the crowd within the club. In straight dance clubs, men and women are likely to dance in couples, and women often dance with each other or in groups. Straight men, however, rarely dance with each other.

In the dance clubs that are mixing gay and straight dance club subcultures, dance partners are also becoming more diverse. While straight men are still likely to be seen only dancing with straight women, straight women, lesbians, and gay men are much more likely to be seen dancing together either in couples or in groups. One of the most popular combinations is gay men and straight women, often close friends of one another, dancing together in the club. While you still



see the same combinations of people as in other clubs, such as gay men dancing with other gay men, it is also common to see other configurations of dance partners.

The highly sexualized atmosphere on the dance floor is seen in the manner in which dancers interact with one another. One style of dancing that exemplifies this atmosphere is what is often referred to as “grinding.” Grinding is a type of dance where two or more people rub their bodies against each other in a highly sexualized manner, often focusing on the genital regions. An example of this can be seen in the 1987 film, *Dirty Dancing*, where the younger generation in the story engages in this sexualized dancing that shocks the older patrons of the country club. In the dance clubs this grinding is sometimes accompanied by kissing between dance partners.

A scene that was repeated on multiple occasions on the dance floors within the clubs, and was mentioned in Chapter 2, was what I term as “grinding lines.” Here people would spontaneously form lines, sometimes intersecting with other lines, where they would grind with the person in front of them while simultaneously grinding with the person directly behind them. This style of dancing appeared to be less about the sexualized nature of the actions and more to do with having fun with a large group of people on the dance floor. The most interesting part of this dancing for purposes of the research was the combinations of people that were engaged in the activity. People of all sexual orientations were involved when these grinding lines were taking place. Gay men, lesbians, bisexual individuals, and straight women took part in any combination and order of people within the line. For example, one gay man may have another gay man in front of him, but a straight woman behind him. The only people that appeared to be in specific combinations were straight men, who I observed to be exclusively with women in front and behind them. In other instances the straight men were positioned at the end of the line with their girlfriends in front of them, with no one grinding with them from behind.

Expressing masculinity through dance can be a very important means of negotiating sexuality in a dance club. If a man is seen as being in a submissive role with another person who is grinding with him from behind, either male or female, some may perceive him as being less masculine than other men who are playing a dominant role. While this may be an important issue for a majority of straight men and some gay or bisexual men who identify as the dominant sexual partner, observations within the club support the idea that gay men are, as a whole, less concerned with the expression of masculinity as it is perceived in mainstream culture through

dance. Ethnomusicologist Henry Spiller has written extensively on the expression of masculinity in dance in Indonesia. In his dissertation, Spiller discusses the complex notions of gender identity and sexuality that are present in dance. He believes that one of the reasons to dance may in fact be to “situate one’s self into the social matrix, to find a way to physically integrate one’s body into the maze of contradictions that make up gender identities” (Spiller, 2001: 347). Male dance club patrons in Tallahassee on metro nights also use dance to try to fit themselves into this maze of cultural contradictions about masculinity in regards to sexual orientation and gender identity.

A fellow graduate student at Florida State University in the Department of Psychology, Kyle Gobrogge, has looked specifically at determining the sex roles of gay men in the bedroom based on their body posture and dance styles on the dance floor. His preliminary research has found that it may be possible to predict the sexual preference of men studied in regards to dominance or submissiveness during sexual intercourse.<sup>9</sup> Gobrogge was in attendance on one of my nights of fieldwork when he further explained how an analysis of the grinding, looking specifically at which partner was in front or behind (where one man is facing away from the other) may be indicative of their sexual preference. Using this preliminary research as a potential model, it could be hypothesized that a possible reason straight men did not want to have another man behind them in the grinding line was because this would be a signal of submissive traits in sexual behavior.

Other than the popular grinding dance style, many people would dance in small groups of friends and acquaintances, often breaking into couples throughout the songs and changing partners at random. This style of dancing in small groups was prevalent early in the evenings when the dance floor was sparsely populated. Many groups and couples dancing were not as sexually explicit as the patrons described above, although the majority of people did dance in a sexualized manner throughout the evening. As more people would enter the dance floor, the temperature of the club would become higher. This would cause people to begin to sweat and want more to drink, which would contribute to the high amount of alcohol sold on any given night within these clubs. Alcohol levels can also suppress inhibitions, leading to an even greater sexualized nature of dance later in the evening.

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<sup>9</sup> Here the dominant role is understood as the sexual partner who penetrates the other, and the submissive role is that of the partner who is penetrated. While these terms may not always be correct in the dynamics of every sexual relationship, they are fairly standard in their use in the field of sexuality studies.

As was mentioned earlier, one of the clubs also employed two go-go dancers who performed on two small stages located within the seating area. There were always two dancers, one man and one woman, who were dressed in small amounts of clothing (often only briefs for the man, and some type of lingerie for the woman). After midnight the two would begin dancing, and dance alone on each of the stages for the remainder of the evening. They would dance in a highly sexualized manner, often receiving tips from patrons as they passed by on the way to the dance floor or bar. The club promoter told me during the interview that the reason for the go-go dancers to be employed was to help create the atmosphere for the club, as well as to encourage club patrons to dance.

Finally, the dance floor at these clubs on each of their alternative nights appears to provide patrons with an expressive freedom not always seen in other clubs. Whether this is due to the openness that members of LGB communities feel for expressing their sexuality, or the freedom many straight women described during interviews from the judgment and annoying persistence of straight men, the dance floor symbolizes a place where many in the gay and straight communities can come together as one group of people for that particular night. This freedom and comfort level is an important aspect of the success of these nights in Tallahassee, and will be discussed further in the next chapter looking at motivations of club patrons.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**‘WHY THIS CLUB?’:**  
**ANSWERING THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION**

Issues of Motivation and Intent

In the preceding chapters I examined club aesthetic, atmosphere, music, and dance in order to provide solid background knowledge of how these particular clubs function in Tallahassee. Excerpts from and discussions of interviews with club promoters and DJs were included, providing insights into specific aspects of metro nights that account for both the social and financial value of such events. All of this information and discussion leads us to this final portion of the thesis, which specifically addresses the central issue of patron motivation and intent. Without the support of the patrons and the money they bring into the club, these nights would end quickly. For this reason, it is important to gain an understanding of who makes up this group of people, and what motivates them to attend on these particular nights.

Before fieldwork began, I hypothesized that the alternative (metro) nights in Tallahassee dance clubs (and by extension, likely in other cities as well) were creating a space for gay and straight dance club subcultures to mix together. While this hypothesis was not invalidated by the observations and interviews conducted during fieldwork, my data and the analysis and interpretations they yielded have ultimately led to altered perspectives and resultant conclusions. There is not an equal representation of different dance club subcultures based on sexual orientation at most of the metro nights in Tallahassee. The majority of club patrons on these nights are gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The make up of the clientele on these nights is dramatically different from that on other nights of the week. Rather than an equal or somewhat even mix of sexual orientations, a conservative estimate for ratios on most nights would be 80-20% LGB and straight patrons, respectively. It appeared as though the LGB communities were taking over the club for one night per week or month, rather than there being an integration of this group with the straight community.

Within this large split, the majority of club patrons were gay or bisexual men. On one particular night in a smaller club, for instance, the majority of the evening included four lesbians,

two straight couples, and approximately thirty gay men.<sup>10</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, the majority of the music is clearly aimed at the gay male community, so it is understandable that not as many bisexual women or lesbians attend these events. A generalization of the sheer numbers of patrons based on sexual orientation on an average night would include (highest to lowest): gay/bisexual men, straight women, bisexual women/lesbians, straight men.

While the ratios may have been different than originally suspected, there was still a variety of patrons in the club each night that were able to provide insights into why they were attending the club, and their thoughts and attitudes towards the sexual orientation community they were not a part of that was also represented in the club on that night. Numerous trends began to emerge during the interviewing process along lines of gender, sexual orientation, and frequency of attendance. In the following section, these trends will be explored using direct quotes and background explanations by the patrons themselves.

### Complexities of Motivation

As stated in the introduction, motivation and intent are key components of the larger narrative of dance club subcultures. Before other questions can be asked and their answers properly understood, one must first get an idea of the reasons why people go to dance clubs. This requires an inquiry into when patrons go to clubs, and for what reasons (social, musical, emotional, and/or psychological) they choose to attend gay clubs, or straight clubs with gay themed nights.

After conducting a number of interviews with people self-described as gay, straight, or bi-curious, a number of interesting items arose that are worthy of discussion. While first discussing reasons for why they choose to go to specific dance clubs, many of the people involved stated they went because of a special event. Events most often consisted of birthday parties, holidays, weekly nights with specials, or drag queen/king shows and competitions. Below the surface, however, more reasons began surfacing as to why these people were going to specific dance clubs. One openly gay interviewee, referred to here as J.T., states:

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<sup>10</sup> Sexual orientation was determined by a number of different means, including personal observations, behaviors of patrons, conversations with patrons, and my knowledge of the LGB communities in Tallahassee.

I feel more comfortable in the open atmosphere of a gay club. I mean, I can be myself and not worry about homophobic comments or violence.

Here the person sees the clubs as places he can go to be himself without worries of repercussions from his actions. J.T. also listed a number of other reasons why he chooses to go to gay themed dance clubs, including the possibility of meeting new people that are in the LGB communities.

It's exciting to get to know more people in the gay community, even if some of them aren't always the people you want to be friends with. You know, in smaller cities it is hard to find other gay people. Here I can find friends, and maybe even get a date.

The feelings of acceptance and freedom that gay clubs provide for members of the gay community are evident in these quotes, and were also stated by many others in the clubs. In their examination of gay clubs in South Africa before the end of the oppressive apartheid government, Gordon Isaacs and Brian McKendrick found that gay clubs provided a "safe and comfortable venue where degrees of intimacy, such as dancing, kissing, touching, and holding hands can be experienced without fear of heterosexual censure" (1992: 100). Based on their research of identity formation and culture of gay men in South Africa, they concluded that the gay discotheque, or club, was "perhaps the most important venue for gay collectiveness and expression" (Ibid, 98). While the political atmosphere in the United States is very different from South Africa's at the time this fieldwork was conducted, many oppressive forces are still at work in various locations, including Tallahassee. The comfort levels expressed by members of the LGB communities of Tallahassee during fieldwork at metro nights could be related to the sentiments shared by South African club patrons in the early 1990s.

Patrons interviewed who were not members of the LGB communities also mentioned a level of comfort that was important in their choice of going to gay rather than straight clubs. One woman, self-identified as straight, said she enjoyed greater freedoms from judgment in gay clubs.

If you go to straight dance clubs, dancing is a part of what you are judged by. You're judged by how you look, how you can dance. It's like this standard. You know, when (I)

go to gay clubs I don't care - I'm not being judged. You walk into a straight club and you are being judged. I don't know if you walk places or have been places where you know you are being judged for how you look, or what you are?

This statement was similar to others made by straight women concerning their level of comfort in gay dance clubs. It appeared that they felt there were less eyes watching and judging them on their appearance, and less of a chance of being hit on by men. As mentioned in the discussion of dance in Chapter 3, gay men and their straight girlfriends often come to the clubs together to enjoy the night within the dynamics of their platonic relationship. The stress levels for both parties are lower because they are there together, and are not necessarily looking for sexual partners. This could possibly be one reason for the high number of straight women in gay dance clubs on any given night.

Another interview conducted with a straight woman who attends gay clubs and straight clubs on alternative nights included statements about her comfort level as well, indicating these clubs offer a more accepting attitude similar to what she was used to in her native country.

I go to gay clubs, or clubs with gay themes, because they have a more liberal atmosphere in this conservative location of Tallahassee. I am from Canada, and these types of clubs remind me of the more accepting, liberal tendencies of the Canadian people.

In this instance, her sexual orientation has little to do with her choice of attending clubs with gay themed events. It is the overall accepting nature of the gay community and others in the club that draws her to these clubs.

Some members of the LGB communities that were interviewed did not always share these feelings of comfort and acceptance. One man interviewed who described himself as gay, discussed his reasons why he went to gay clubs, centering on the music played by DJs. When asked about feeling more comfortable in a gay club versus a straight club, the interviewee, known here as A.J., had a very different response than J.T. listed above. In the interview, he discussed going to both a gay dance club, and other mostly straight clubs that played either country music or hip/hop. The following is a short transcription of that portion of the interview:

A.J.: I am more comfortable at the red-neck country bar I think.

TR: Really? More comfortable than at the gay bar?

A.J.: I get nervous around large groups of gay people. I think about it too much.

TR: What do you mean? I'm not following.

A.J.: It's like a saturation in a strange environment that's not like real life. There are so many gay people in one small space. It makes me feel uncomfortable... I mean, I like the music there better. And that's why we go to that bar more I guess. But I really feel more comfortable in some of the other straight clubs in town.

TR: Have you ever had people, you know, harass you at the straight clubs, if you were dancing with another guy?

A.J.: Not really. They might laugh a little bit, but it's more of a joking thing than a serious thing.

This portion of the interview shows yet another viewpoint on the reasons why people choose to go to certain dance clubs. Rather than choosing it for its comfort level, A.J. chose to go to gay clubs over straight clubs on certain nights because of the music. How patrons identify with the music played on metro nights can play a key role in their motivations to attend the club. As stated in Chapter 3, DJs often play more underground music familiar to the gay community as the evening progresses and a large number of gay men enter the club. In *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making*, Fiona Buckland discusses the importance of music in dance clubs to the LGB communities. She mentions the alternative meanings for gay men found in songs such as "Y.M.C.A." and "Macho Man," and the importance of the disco music genre to the gay community in the early years. The identification of disco with gay culture was so strong that she wrote during her fieldwork, "one man (she) met declared he doubted he was gay for



many years because he hated it” (2002: 68). As is evident from this quote, music itself can be a strong motivating factor for attending, or in this case not attending, dance clubs.

Another interviewed patron, self-identified as a gay man, discussed some of the issues he has with gay themed nights, and his reasons why he rarely attends these clubs. First he expressed frustration over the weekly or monthly “gay nights” in some of the clubs in town:

Gay nights at these clubs are similar to “separate but equal” policies. I don’t believe that there is a true mixing of gay and straight patrons, just because it is a gay night in a straight club. It is more like the gay community is allowed one night, separated from the rest of the week, in order to have “equal rights” like straight patrons... Some gay people may not want straight people at the gay night if there is only one per week or month. We only get this one chance to be ourselves, whereas they get any night of the week at any club.

Here he equates these alternative nights to historical events in the civil rights struggles based on race and ethnicity in the United States. He does not believe that a mixing of dance club subcultures is necessarily occurring, nor does he think it always should. Later in the conversation he also mentions some of the issues he has with clubs with gay themed nights and events.

Because it is only one night per week, it is like a caricature of gay lifestyle. All of the negative aspects come out because it is only that one night where the gay community feels comfortable with their surroundings.

This sentiment was expressed by other patrons at the club, both gay and straight. The highly sexualized atmosphere discussed in Chapter 2 and again in the discussion of dance in Chapter 3 turns off many people from attending these clubs more frequently. These stereotypes of the LGB communities are seemingly played out on the dance floor, and many people do not want to associate themselves with them. While some in the communities may be in one sense performing their gay dance club culture on the dance floor through this highly sexualized display

of movement, others in the communities who do not share their cultural views may be turned off by what they see as a perpetuation of negative gay stereotypes.

On the other hand, many people attend these clubs precisely because of this atmosphere. If it is one of the only places that a member of the LGB communities can express his or her sexuality in public, it may be seen as an important part of the life of some of these people who may feel repressed by a society rooted in heterosexist views. It is important to note that this atmosphere is not unique to gay clubs, or clubs with gay themed nights. Highly sexualized atmospheres are found in nearly all dance clubs, gay or straight. Due to the disproportionately large number of straight clubs, the gay community has fewer opportunities to take part in these activities. In many portions of the United States, they also have fewer opportunities to show public displays of affection than do their heterosexual counterparts. For this reason, having the opportunity to express these emotions in public are a driving force for some attending the club.

#### Case Study: A Straight Couple at Metro Night

During an interview session with a gay man on metro night, he informed me that he and his boyfriend had brought a straight couple with them for the evening. The woman was an employee at his boyfriend's business, and she had brought her boyfriend along to the club. He wanted me to talk with them because they rarely came to such nights. After he grabbed her off the dance floor, she walked over excitedly to talk with me, exclaiming "So you're the guy writing the thesis? I've already heard all about you from my friend!" This statement startled me, as I had not talked with many people at that point in my fieldwork. She explained that her friend was someone I had previously contacted to set up an interview, and the news of my fieldwork had spread quickly throughout the club community. I found this to be true in subsequent interviews, when many people already knew who I was and what I was doing at the club before I introduced myself. This provided an interesting observation and dilemma for me as a researcher. First I came to realize how small the gay community, and club patron community, was in Tallahassee. Everyone talked to each other about what was happening, thus they knew who I was shortly after I began conducting interviews. I also had to deal with the dilemma that the more I interviewed, the more people already seemed to know what I was going to ask them. This could have affected the responses of some of the patrons that I interviewed. Overall, people

were either excited that I was doing what they saw as important work, or confused as to why anyone would ever want to know what I was researching.

As I continued my discussion with the woman at the club, she told me that her boss was also a friend, and he had suggested that she come out to the club with him and his boyfriend for the evening. She stated:

I'm comfortable with my sexuality. I just want to dance and drink, so I don't care if there are gay people or straight people here.

Her response indicated that the choice of this particular venue for the evening was not as important as the fact that it had alcohol and a dance floor with a live DJ. Given the fact that her boss was also a friend, and he is gay, she may have a high comfort level with members of the LGB communities.

Her boyfriend, who was planted firmly by her side for the evening, provided a number of insightful responses to my questions. Initially he was visibly uncomfortable talking with me, but became more at ease when his girlfriend continued to talk with me as well. He stated that the reason he was at the club was because his girlfriend had wanted to go. I then asked him how he felt being a straight man at a metro night:

I'm comfortable with my sexuality. I know that I'm straight. And I'm pretty comfortable because my girlfriend is right by my side. I would probably be uncomfortable if she wasn't around.

When asked if he would come to the club on a metro night in the future without her, he yelled "Hell no!" Everyone in the group around us laughed at this emphatic statement. His girlfriend rolled her eyes, and grabbed him away to go get another drink.

These responses were important in my research, and were similar to those of other straight men I observed and with whom I spoke. While there were exceptions, most often straight men in the clubs on alternative nights were to be seen with their girlfriend (or at least some straight woman) on their arm. This seemed to be a clear signal to everyone in the club that they were straight, and were not interested in being hit on by another man. Other straight men

expressed that they were usually in these clubs because of a special event, including a birthday party or bar crawl. Without the event, they would probably not attend. These straight men were by far the minority in the club on any given night. The male societal power structure usually in place was turned upside down, creating an interesting atmosphere for these men to participate. While in the past I have known straight men who attend gay clubs because they enjoy the music, the straight men I interviewed on metro nights in Tallahassee were in attendance largely because of unrelated parties, bar crawls, or at the request of their girlfriends.

### Drawing Conclusions of Motivation

The variety of answers from patron interviews discussed in this chapter show how complex the issue of motivation is for people attending metro nights in Tallahassee. Although every person has a slightly different answer when it comes to why they are attending the club, some larger trends emerge when looking at the interviews overall. Levels of comfort, for both LGB patrons and straight women, were cited by many patrons as the key reason why they attended these clubs. For the LGB communities, these nights represent an avenue they can use to display their affection towards people of the same sex without fear of harassment or violence. Whether it is with a partner or a new acquaintance, public displays of affection are acceptable for everyone in the club regardless of sexual orientation. These nights are also important in developing a sense of community for LGB and straight patrons. As stated by Buckland:

Dance clubs – most especially queer dance clubs – were spaces to be fabulous... Because in a queer lifeworld, being fabulous was hard currency. It was exchanged for belonging to a peer group, for being loved and desired, and for self-esteem (2002: 36-37).

Comfort levels for straight women also played a major factor into their decision to attend these clubs. Many stated they enjoyed the freedom from judgment of other straight women and men, and freedom from being hit on by straight men. Others stated they also enjoyed the liberal atmosphere of the club, and the acceptance level of everyone found within. (However, this may not be shared with gay men who felt they were often being judged by others in these clubs.)

Another large factor for people attending the clubs was the music and atmosphere. Many people simply enjoyed the dance music that was being played by the DJs on these nights, and

therefore wanted to attend whether they were gay, bisexual, or straight. The intense energy and highly sexualized atmosphere worked with the music to create a club aesthetic that was wanted by most of the patrons. The sexual orientations of the other club patrons were not as important as the music and aesthetic to these people. It was just one of many details about the club that brought them out that night.

One last factor that brought people to the club was an outside force that created a situation where they were attending when they usually would abstain from going. This included birthday parties, bar crawls, and significant others that wanted them to come. The largest group of people in this category was straight men, who were often found with their girlfriends within reach. While they may not have chosen to go to the club on their own, they were there nonetheless due to other circumstances. This creates exposure of the LGB communities to a subset of the straight community that may in the future prove important for the advancement of civil rights, which was one of the major reasons for these nights according to the club promoters interviewed for Chapter 2. As they stated earlier, an important part of this scenario was to expose the straight, mainstream community to members of the LGB communities every week in order to remind them that they are a part of Tallahassee every day. In other communities that do not have such metro nights nor gay clubs, the only visibility of the LGB communities may be during a week or weekend in June for a gay pride festival.

There was no visible social activist motivation regarding patrons who may have attended the club to make a social statement. One early hypothesis of motivation for patrons was the possibility that people may be going to these alternative nights in order to make a statement to society indicating they were supportive of the LGB communities. While this may be the case for some people, those interviewed did not list this as a reason for attending the clubs researched. The only indication I found was actually working in the opposite direction, instances where gay men with whom I was acquainted during the study explained to me that they had decided not to attend these nights because they felt they were reinforcing negative stereotypes of the gay community.

All of the experiential and preferential motivations listed above work together to collectively ensure a sizable group of patrons for every alternative night within the clubs of Tallahassee. In the end, more people are choosing to attend the clubs on these nights, thus sustaining their economic value for club owners from week to week, or month to month.

Regardless of the reason(s) why they choose to attend, club patrons are changing the make up of these clubs. People of different sexual orientations are mixing, even if not in the ratios once thought. How will these trends continue in the future? Will the changing social atmosphere of the United States, and more specifically North Florida, alter the way clubs make money on metro nights? These questions will be important to consider in the months and years ahead.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the merging of gay and straight dance club subcultures through an analysis of two nightclubs in Tallahassee, Florida, that had alternative/metro nights. Using participant-observation techniques, informal conversations with patrons, DJs, and club promoters, and analyses of music lyrics and dance, I examined the mixing of members of communities with different sexual orientations. I focused my attention on the motivations of patrons for attending clubs, centering my inquiry on one fundamental question: Why do you frequent this particular club? An analysis of the answers collected from this fieldwork revealed three patterns emerging that transcended both gender and sexual orientation. First, many patrons are attending metro nights due to the comfort they feel within the club on these evenings. Members of the LGB communities feel a particular freedom from the negative attitudes of mainstream culture within the club. Straight women also feel a freedom from judgment found in straight clubs by other women and straight men. Second, many people attend the clubs specifically for the music and club aesthetic on these evenings. As detailed in Chapter 3, the music is geared towards high energy dancing, and evolves throughout the night to include many genres and styles of music. Due to the mixed crowd (both in terms of gender and sexual orientation), the DJs have to provide a wider variety of music over the course of the night. This means that at some point during the evening there will be music to be enjoyed by people of every sexual orientation. This, in conjunction with the lighting, sound system, and other club features, creates a unique atmosphere for the patrons to enjoy on these nights. Third, many patrons who may not have chosen to attend on their own were in the club due to parties, bar crawls, or encouragement from friends or significant others. Most often these people were straight, and in some instances the event was their first interaction with the LGB communities.

Initially I hypothesized that some patrons were attending these nights to make a social statement to mainstream society and show their support of the LGB communities. While this may still be the case for some people, the vast majority did not have a social agenda for attending these nights. My hypothesis was confirmed, however, at a more underlying level by the club promoters. In their minds, the main reason for these nights was to provide greater exposure of the LGB communities to mainstream society in Tallahassee. They hope that positive changes in attitudes and beliefs about members of the LGB communities will be the result of this increased

visibility. Thus, while many patrons do not have a specific social agenda for attending the clubs, those organizing the events are hoping that these nights will slowly produce positive social changes for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in Tallahassee.

Jacque Attali's discussion of how music acts either as a prophesy of social change, or as a mirror of how society currently functions, is relevant to the larger picture created by this thesis. An argument can be made that the greater acceptance of the LGB communities in many areas of the United States is being mirrored in the dance clubs in which I conducted fieldwork. Here the larger social change occurring in mainstream society is influencing the smaller dance club communities in Tallahassee. Another argument can also be made that the club patrons in the study are pushing this social change through their actions, where the dance clubs and music are acting as a prophesy of what is to come in mainstream society in the form of greater acceptance and celebration of people of different sexual orientations. Rather than situate these arguments against each other, I posit that they are working together within a dialectical relationship. Changing attitudes of the larger mainstream population are allowing these nights to occur in North Florida, and the club patrons in Tallahassee are taking advantage of these opportunities by pushing the boundaries even further in order to create social change. In the end, this transformation of the musicultural traditions and conventions of dance clubs is slowly contributing to the creation of a more inclusive, pansexual club culture that allows for a celebration and experience of difference in gender and sexuality that is not always acceptable in other contexts of mainstream culture.



## APPENDIX A

### HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

Blackboard Academic Suite

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Office of the Vice President For Research  
Human Subjects Committee  
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742  
(850) 644-8673 · FAX (850) 644-4392

#### APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 10/8/2008

To: Todd Rosendahl

Address: 925 East Magnolia Drive Apt. O-2 Tallahassee, Florida 32301  
Dept.: MUSIC SCHOOL

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research

"Working it Out on the Dance Floor: The Role of Music and Dance Clubs in an Emerg

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects :  
Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project  
been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, ex  
of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped  
stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 10/7/2009 you must request a renewal of appre  
notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility  
approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and appre  
change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted  
require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated prot  
others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professo  
concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should re  
being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protectior

Cc: Michael Bakan, Advisor  
HSC No. 2008.1717

## APPENDIX B

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

#### Informed Consent Form

“Working it Out on the Dance Floor: The Role of Music and Dance Clubs in an Emerging Pansexual Culture”

You are invited to be in a research study looking at the mixing of dance club subcultures. You were selected as a possible participant because you have experiences within dance clubs. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Todd Rosendahl, a student in the Musicology Department of Florida State University.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to discuss with dance club patrons their motivations for attending various dance clubs. This study will focus specifically on why people of differing sexual orientations are attending the same clubs. The study will also include additional information obtained from multiple dance club owners and club DJs.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to answer questions during one interview lasting no more than twenty minutes. This interview can take place either inside or outside of the dance club depending on your preference. No follow up interviews will be conducted.

#### **Risks and benefits of being in the Study:**

There are no risks involved with being in this study. No names or other identifiers will be recorded with responses during the interview.

There are no benefits of being in this study.

#### **Compensation:**

You will not receive payments or any other compensation for being a part of this study.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private and confidential to the extent allowed by law. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Patrons, club owners, and DJs from multiple clubs will be interviewed, and the confidentiality of the responses from these people will

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be assured due to the fact that neither the names of the participants, nor the names of the dance clubs, will be included in the written results of the study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect you in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Todd Rosendahl. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have a question later, you are encouraged to contact him at:

Florida State University, College of Music, HMU  
Tallahassee, FL 32306.  
850-766-7559  
tjr07g@fsu.edu

You can also contact the professor advising this research project, Michael Bakan, at:

Florida State University, College of Music, LON  
Tallahassee, FL 32306-1180  
850-644-4255  
mbakan@fsu.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher or advisor, you are encouraged to contact the FSU IRB at 2010 Levy Street, Research Building B, Suite 276, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2742, or 850-644-8633, or by email at [jjccoper@fsu.edu](mailto:jjccoper@fsu.edu).

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

FSU Human Subjects Committee Approved on 10/8/2008. Void after 10/7/2009. HSC#: 2008.1717

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Todd Rosendahl graduated in 2006 with Highest Distinction and Honors in Education from the University of Iowa, where he earned a Bachelor of Music degree with an emphasis in percussion performance and certification to teach K-12 music. During his undergraduate career he studied, performed, and taught music in North America, Europe, and Asia. After completing his Master of Music degree in May 2009, he will continue his studies at Florida State University working towards a Ph. D. in Musicology (Ethnomusicology Emphasis).