Voyages from the Centre to the Margins:
An ethnography of long term ocean cruisers

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Gayle Ruth Jennings
Foreword

Research is an experience not unlike an epic voyage. Along the way, challenges test the researcher in her or his quest for knowledge. These challenges can lead the researcher on a circuitous path or in a new direction. My initial attempts at writing this thesis were certainly circuitous. For I discovered that the experience of research was also like another genre; it was like theatre. I realise such a metaphor is not new – William Shakespeare claimed its use long ago and within this century, social phenomena have been metaphorically described using various dramaturgical devices, see for example the work of Erving Goffman (1953).

However, in the process of my research, I observed that the world is indeed a stage. The participants and myself were social actors wearing a variety of masks and adopting a variety of roles, as the social settings required. All this was done in an attempt to negotiate the multiple realities of our worlds. For a time sociological theories and theorists directed the masks, the roles and the scripts. Finally and thankfully, however, the masks, the roles and the scripts were directed by the social actors themselves, the cruisers, the co-researchers. When this occurred I was able to resume my voyage. My path took me through new ground and to a new destination arriving with a deeper understanding of the people I was co-researching. I say co-researching, as I, along with the cruisers who were participants in this study, co-negotiated the social reality of their worlds and their lives and their meanings.

And so in accordance with my co-researchers’ directions and scripts, metaphors relating to maritime voyaging are used to organise the thesis and to guide readers in their subsequent passage through its texts as well as to reaffirm the setting of this study. For non-sailors, a glossary of terms is provided at the end of the thesis. Vignettes are also used at the commencement of each of the ethnographic chapters
to highlight the main themes, and images punctuate the text to reiterate these themes.

As a whole, the thesis is organised into three parts. The first part is an introduction to the study and my researcher 'situatedness', the second part is an ethnographic portrayal of the cruisers, whilst the third part develops the theoretical analysis of the cruisers’ narratives and experiences. This latter part is constructed from grounded theory analysis and constitutes the theoretical component of this voyage of research. As a consequence, the reader will note that there is no separate section entitled the 'Literature Review', it is subsumed into the theoretical analysis in the second part of the thesis. Specifically, each of the theoretically informed chapters apply an inductive approach to the presentation and analysis of the cruisers’ narratives. Furthermore, as is the case in grounded theory analysis, it is the cruisers’ voices which orchestrate and direct the discussions and analysis as well as the selection of voices from the theoretical cast. A cast in the end drawn from the disciplines of sociology, social psychology and tourism studies.
Abstract

Long term ocean cruisers are self defined as people who have accepted, adopted or chosen a cruising lifestyle, who live aboard their own sailing vessels, have independent means, are self sufficient and have been away from their port of departure for an extended period of time. As a group, cruisers, constitute a subculture (Macbeth, 1985).

Why do people choose to adopt a cruising lifestyle? Using the principles of grounded theory analysis, this study found that cruisers were motivated by a variety of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations as well as by their social background and status in society. Cruisers were motivated by a need to escape the pressures and constraints of their home society as well as to pursue a lifestyle which offered freedom and a sense of personal control, a need to add some adventure or challenge to their lives or to fulfil a dream. They were also motivated by relationship commitments and a desire to travel and experience new cultures, people and settings. Their age, gender, family life cycle stage, education, income and former lifestyle pursuits also motivated them. In setting about and maintaining the fulfilment of their motivations, cruisers exhibited personal agency in their choice to move from a life in the centre of mainstream western societies to one in the margins.

Overall, cruisers were found to be social actors who exhibit agency and self governance in decision making as to whether or not to maintain a sense of ‘connectivity’ with and without various social settings. Cruisers’ responses to feelings of anomie and alienation in their home societies, to their feelings of under- or non-actualisation at the individual level, and to their need for belonging with a partner activated these people to make choices and decisions regarding the negotiation and direction of their own social realities. Based on the cruisers who
participated in this study, such agency and self governance can be described as ‘empowered connectivity’. Empowered connectivity is the action of exhibiting agency in order to achieve connectivity with the space in which an individual currently finds her or himself. It can be both a holding on to and a letting go of connections. Empowered connectivity is not a ‘theory’ *per se*, but rather a generic representation of a process that accounts for ‘plurality, multiplicity and difference’ (Tong 1989) in the actions of both women and men as they negotiate the spaces they choose to occupy.

Moreover, this study informed by the interpretive social sciences paradigm and a ‘feminist methodology’ enabled an in-depth understanding of cruising women’s experiences to be counterpointed against cruising men’s experiences. Subsequently, cruising women became subjects in their own right rather than ‘other’. Further, the interpretive social sciences paradigm and ‘feminist methodology’ emphasised the need for tourism research, in particular, to use both emic and etic perspectives in data collection and analysis.

This ethnographic study of cruisers was conducted between 1985 and 1999 on the eastern seaboard of Australia. The study involved participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews and self-completion questionnaires relating to sociodemographics, vessel inventories, budgets and touristic experiences.
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Knowledge, learning and understanding are power, they enable one to negotiate the world. I learnt these tenets as a child. My parents, Viv and Alma Jennings, were my first teachers and instilled in me a strong desire for knowledge and understanding and an insatiable urge to learn about the world. My grandparents and great grandfather also contributed to my education by answering questions and allowing me to take risks in a safe environment. My sister's pride in my achievements is humbling.
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