OCEAN CRUISING: A STUDY OF AFFIRMATIVE DEVIANCE

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BComm, MA

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University

1985
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 University.

Jim Macbeth
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ABSTRACT

Modern day ocean voyaging in private sailing vessels dates back to the turn of the century. Despite this, the present thesis is the first academic study of ocean cruising to be completed. Of the thousands of people who make ocean voyages only a few hundred are committed to the lifestyle of cruising, that is, see cruising as a whole way of life that they will pursue indefinitely. The thesis first presents an ethnography of the lifestyle of cruising with particular attention to (1) what activities constitute the lifestyle, (2) why people cruise, and (3) what values, attitudes, and characteristics attach to the participants. Second, the thesis relates this ethnography to several theories in sociology and psychology.

In sociology, subculture and deviance theories are used to place cruising in the context of the wider scholastic study of society. Pearson (1979) and others are drawn upon in placing cruising in the context of subcultures while the work of Walter Buckley (1967) is used to modify deviance theory to account for the apparently positive nature of the deviance inherent in the cruising lifestyle.

In psychology, theories of autotelic rewards, enjoyment, and human satisfaction are used to understand the experience of and motivation to cruise. In addition, theories of personal growth developed by Hampden-Turner (1970) and others are applied to cruisers and their way of life.

The thesis concludes that cruisers, as cultural 'heroes', can be seen as affirmative deviants. That is to say, given an humanistic and western individualistic value system their deviance can be seen as contributing to their individual health and growth, and to positive social evolution.
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PREFACE

It is no myth - in this world there are people who sail the oceans for years on end. Some have no goal in mind and others have very clear ideas of where they are going. Many of these people have been ocean cruising, as it is called, for up to twenty years and others for fewer years but with no final destination in mind. Of the thousands of people who make ocean passages only a few are committed to the lifestyle of cruising, that is, few see cruising as a whole way of life that they will pursue indefinitely. It is to these committed long-term cruisers that this study is directed. Why do they go cruising? Why do they stay cruising and make it a way of life? What kind of people can survive? What do they want for themselves and what do they want for human societies?

Estimates vary regarding the number of long-term cruisers. However, my research and experience suggest there are between 400 and 1500 people in the world who have been cruising for longer than a year and who have no plans to stop cruising. They are the population of interest in this study. Coming from all walks of life and from many different countries they range in age from babies to retirees in their seventies. Not surprisingly, they come predominantly from the western, affluent countries and tend to have a high level of education.¹ While all cruisers have a sizeable asset in their boat, most do not have

¹ See Appendix I for biographical details of the sample interviewed for this study.
sizeable incomes. Most have to work part of each year in order to survive financially and very few can afford to hire crew or maintenance helpers.

The mythology about cruising tends to extremes - from trade-wind sailing and anchoring in tropical island lagoons to violent storms and shipwrecks at sea. Neither extreme comes close to representing the totality of the cruising lifestyle - and it is a lifestyle, not simply a set of exotic activities tacked on to the everyday reality of urban living. Not only is there a lifestyle extant in cruising, but it is uniform enough to be called a subculture.

This study came about because of a conjunction of professional and personal interests. I had long been attracted to the sea and maritime communities but had never been more than a distant observer and, latterly, a resident in an ocean-side suburb. Then in 1976 I bought a thirty-year old boat and learned to sail. About the same time I was completing a major research project that was of only marginal interest but was professionally relevant. I decided that my next research project would have to be both professionally relevant and personally interesting. By 1977 I had decided that cruising was worthy of study. My humanistic orientation suggested that cruising might represent psychological health, that people's reasons for cruising might represent their attempt to actualise themselves in terms of so-called higher needs.

I also wondered what lay beyond the myth. So, in 1977, I began reading their stories, beginning with an anthology that spanned the years 1900 to 1935. That whetted my appetite. During 1977 I read widely until in my mind I had circumnavigated the world many times, had fought the Straits of Magellan and been around 'the Horn' both singlehanded and on crewed boats. I'd 'joined' the first catamaran circumnavigation and been dismasted a few times, including twice in the Southern Ocean. I'd sailed on all oceans and seas of the world from the Baltic and North Atlantic to the Indian and Southern Oceans. Tropical
islands had been enjoyed as had the magic of ocean passages in the trades. Authors had led me from the earliest building stages through provisioning, shake-down cruises, the first passage and landfall and through to the successful completion of their lifelong dream to circumnavigate the world. I had 'lived' with cruisers aboard their boats and as they tried to arrange repairs, cope with officials, shop in foreign languages, and adjust to strange foods and customs. I was beginning to have a clearer idea of the life involved and to realise that there was a subculture of cruising, a whole way of life that was worth studying. There appeared to be no previous academic study and no other surveys either.²

With 1977 over, I used study leave to design a research instrument and to carry out the first stage of the field work. As well as interviewing, I planned my research effort in order to experience cruising first-hand. Therefore, I spent six months cruising and living on boats in the Pacific Ocean. At the same time I conducted the first half of the interviews. This was followed up in other years, especially 1981, with further interviewing and the two racing surveys.

Being in and involved with the cruising lifestyle was an enjoyable phase in my life. Much harder, but satisfying in its own way, has been the attempt to make sense of these people, their motivations, their characteristics, and their way of life. In reporting how they see themselves and in developing an understanding of the lifestyle it has been hard to avoid an appearance of favourable bias, of seeing cruising through 'rose coloured glasses'. This problem is exacerbated because I am studying those committed to cruising, not those who have left it disillusioned; this is a study of people who choose to stay cruising. Certainly, their disillusionment comes through occasionally; the

² A number of cruising surveys have now been published by cruisers but they are not academically oriented and tend more to issues of cost, boat design, and so forth. Cornell (1983) is the most recent and comprehensive.
loneliness of some of the singlehanders is obvious. But, by and large, these are minor issues overshadowed by their commitment to a way of life that suits their values, attitudes, personality, skills, and most of their needs.

The underlying 'hunch', then, was that people who cruise sail as a way of life would not be 'no-hopers', would perhaps be more than simply 'escaping' modern society, and would be making personally fulfilling and healthy choices. They could be seen as in a 'growthful' experience in psychological terms. Because I did not want to study ill-health nor people or lifestyles which were pathological this latter 'hunch' was one of the things that intrigued me. I was also interested in these people as deviants but it seemed to me that the pejorative view of deviance probably would not be applicable. At the earliest stage, then, I thought of these people as 'affirmative deviants', a term I have now developed in detail. Clearly, there are aspects of cruising which are 'affirmative' especially for individuals but it is arguable that the lifestyle itself is affirmative in societal terms.

We may be reminded of C. Wright Mills' admonition that "social scientists' foremost political and intellectual task [is] ... to make clear the elements of contemporary uneasiness and indifference." (1959:20) Not only do cruisers espouse an expression of uneasiness about modern society but they are important for two other reasons. First, the plethora of books, articles and such like suggests a fascination by many people outside cruising that places cruising in the realm of 'fantasy' for millions of people. In this regard, cruisers also represent an uneasiness in modern society.

Second, cruisers are important in Mills' terms because they speak as the 'advantaged' in society, they are what Flacks (1967) called 'a revolt of the advantaged.' In the social sciences there has been a tendency to 'study down' and to believe that the problems and issues deemed legitimate for the social sciences are those of the, shall we say, 'subordinate groups'. They are the less advantaged in society who
cannot resist the researcher as effectively as can the societal hegemony. At the same time, social sciences have seen as their duty and aim to 'help' the disadvantaged, that is, these 'subordinate groups'. This has been especially noted in relation to the sociology of deviance but it has also been alluded to in relation to psychology where there has been an overwhelming tendency to study ill-health and ignore, for the most part, healthy people. Of course, psychology's use of mental institutions and first year psychology students as sources of subjects again means a focus on those with less power and a consequent ignorance of those with more power. There is a need, then, to study the advantaged, something this research in effect does. In the same way as humanistic psychology tries to understand health by study of the healthy so to can we get further knowledge of society by a study of a select group of the advantaged. Crusiers are among the advantaged of modern society and their deviance, or 'revolt', can tell us something about society that others cannot because of a different underlying perspective.

This is a study that is first and foremost of personal interest and relevance and which can at the same time be seen as socially relevant.

* * * * *

I want to acknowledge the help and encouragement of a number of people. Over the course of this study, three supervisors have guided the research and then the thesis. John Raser's most important role was in encouraging me to use participant observation and to survey using an interview not a formal questionnaire. Geoff Stokes came toward the end and his real help was in pushing me to effectively synthesize the entire thesis. Patsy Hallen's contribution was more general throughout the years providing a foil to the others and reading numerous drafts - and because her experience as an ocean sailor helped her to see where I'd got it wrong. I thank them all for their patient reading of too many drafts.
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This study could not have been accomplished without the help of the subjects – authors unwittingly and survey respondents directly. The latter each contributed hours of their time in answering my questions and to them especially I say thank-you.

Good sailing all!
PART I

INTRODUCTION